MY BRAVE NEW WORLD ESSAYS: VOL. V

Alton C. Thompson

55 + 61 + 64 + 78 + 71 = 329 Essays

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Me sometime in the early 1970s, by Cumberland Falls, Kentucky

(I'm much handsomer now!)

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Society and Mentality
Alton C. Thompson

The term "Agricultural Revolution," given to important events that began to occur around 10,000 years ago, is a misnomer, and not only because more was involved with this revolution than the *means* by which we obtained our food—cultivation and animal tending, rather than gathering and hunting. In addition, this "revolution" involved:

- Changes in the *nature* of the foods consumed (e.g., grains becoming more important, and a general narrowing of the diet).

- Changes in how people *related* to others in the group (from relatively egalitarian situations to ones in which there was growing *domination* by some over others—those others being forced to *submit* to this situation).

- Changes in the nature of *occupance*—from moving from place to place to remaining at a fixed location.

As important as these *physical* changes were, of perhaps even more importance were changes in "mentality":

- Those exerting dominance over others were tending to develop a *control* mentality (and transmitting such a mentality to their children); those being dominated were tending to develop a *submissive* mentality (and transmitting *that* mentality to their children).

- The new sociological situation, in conjunction with (a) a more sedentary manner of living and (b) the new economic activities, tended to *divert* peoples' attention away from the fact that they were a part of Earth Ecosystem and to think, rather, that Nature was "other"—i.e., something other than themselves. Instead of perceiving the surround as wondrous (*sacred*, even), beautiful, something to live *with*, the surround came to be perceived from a purely *utilitarian* standpoint—something containing potentially *useful* things, which could be wrenched from the surround at will (i.e., lived *against*), without any thought of the possible *consequences* of so doing.

- The *diversity* of thoughts that occupied the mind prior to the "Agricultural Revolution" started to become ever *narrower* in range—as members of the "elite" came to devote more and more of their attention to control (of others) activities, and *all* members of a society came to focus more and more on their role in the society's *economic* activities.

Although the control mentality that was developing (with the "elite") *initially* expressed itself only in *sociological* terms, the facts that (a) this mentality was developing in tandem with a removal of the mind from the surround, in conjunction with (b) the new economy (and its increased presence in the minds of the society's members) set the stage for *technological* developments—relative to protection (from other societies) on the one hand, and economic production, on the other. And the mentality that was growing was such as to result in technological development becoming a process that "feeds on itself."

Given that technological developments are never *neutral* in their effects, as technological developments occurred, there were changes (a) in the social structure (as new *categories* of specialists came into being), (b) the nature of relationships within the society, (c) the settlement pattern, etc. And these various *physical* developments helped intensify the *mental* developments that were already underway.

Changes in mentality got expressed in changes in *religious* thinking—and to a degree the new religious thinking became a causal factor. For the most part, however, religious thinking merely *reflected* changes of both a physical and mental nature that were occurring in the society— although a society's members would not have been able to recognize this fact, and would have hotly denied it, had it been brought to their attention.

Gregory Bateson stated famously in his 1970 "Form, Substance, and Difference" lecture (p. 468)

> If you put God outside and set him vis-à-vis his creation and if you have the idea that you are created *in* his image, you will logically and naturally see yourself as outside and against the things around you. And as you arrogate all mind to yourself, you will see the world around you as mindless and therefore not entitled to moral or ethical consideration. The environment will seem to be yours to exploit. Your survival unit will be you and your folks or conspecifics against the environment of other social units, other races and the brutes and vegetables. If this is your estimate of your relation to nature *and you have an advanced technology,* your likelihood of survival will be that of a snowball in hell. You will die either of the toxic by-products of your own hate, or, simply, of over-population and overgrazing. The raw materials of the world are finite.

Bateson then added (p. 469):

> If I am right, the whole of our thinking about what we are and what other people are has got to be restructured. This is not funny, and I do not know how long we have to do it in. If we continue to operate on the premises that were fashionable in the precybernetic era, and which were especially underlined and strengthened during the Industrial Revolution, which seemed to validate the Darwinian unit of survival, we may have twenty or thirty years before the logical *reductio ad absurdum* of our old positions destroys us. Nobody knows how long we have, under the present system, before some disaster strikes us, more serious than the destruction of any group of nations. The most important task today is, perhaps, to learn to think in the new way.

Bateson gave religious ideas too much of a causal role; [1] and although one can perhaps agree that our "most important task today" is "to learn to think in the new way," for some strange reason Bateson's claim here is *unecological* (!)—in that it fails to recognize the fact that one's

thinking is *not* independent of one's societal-historical situation. It may be true that individuals vary in their ability to transcend the dominant mode of thinking in their society, but *none* can transcend it completely—which is, though, fortunate, because one's ability to *understand* the society would thereby be lessened, as one's ability to *communicate* with other members of the society. Some of those able to transcend, significantly, their society's limits we label "prophets"—whose impact (if any!) is enabled by the fact of their incomplete transcendence and, therefore, ability both to understand their society and to communicate the problems that they perceive to their fellow societal "inmates."

All of us are, today, in a very real sense, creatures of the "Agricultural Revolution" and the various developments that have occurred during the past 10,000 years. One way of thinking about this past is as a *weight*—something that weighs us down, and makes it difficult for us to "change course." Bateson seems to have had confidence that a change in direction was *possible*—it requiring "only" that we change the nature of our thinking. I, however, do not share that confidence. The "handwriting on the wall" that *I* see is that disaster lies ahead—a belief that was intensified by a recent posting by Noam Chomsky.

Given the increase in the global mean temperature that has occurred so far (i.e., 0.8˚ C.), in conjunction with the increase that is likely to occur because of the greenhouse gases *currently present* (between 1˚ and 1.6˚ C.), it is virtually certain that a "tipping point" will be crossed within a matter of decades, after which changes—all of them deleterious—will accelerate. And what *that* possibility ignores is the possibility that nuclear weapons will "do us in" even sooner!

As I have argued in various previous essays, efforts to engage in adaptive activities offer some promise, some "reason for hope"—but not much, and for only a few. Still, because there *is* some reason to believe that our species need not become extinct, one would like to see those having capabilities for leading adaptive efforts using their abilities for that purpose. However, if such efforts *are* underway, they are not being publicized—or publicized *well*.

Endnote

1. One might argue (as I did in a recent essay!) that, e.g., Martin Luther and John Calvin played an important role in the rise of capitalism, but what must be kept in mind that *economic forces* that were developing provided the basis for the growth in influence of their ideas. Had those economic forces been absent, the ideas of these two men would likely have developed differently—perhaps in a way that neither of them would be known today.

   I am not here denying that the ideas of Luther and Calvin had causal efficacy; what I *am* saying, however, is that the rise to prominence of these two men and their ideas must be understood with reference to the societal changes—in the economy, especially—that were occurring in their time.

A Communities Program:
Some Tentative Ideas

Alton C. Thompson

I first (I believe) encountered the historical figure Robert Owen about 50 years ago, in reading *The Western Intellectual Tradition: From Leonardo to Hegel*, by J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish.[1] At the time, I was a member of the Book Find Club, and as the subject matter of the book appealed to me, I ordered a copy for myself. That the authors of this book regarded Owen as an important component of the Western intellectual tradition is indicated by the fact that they devoted an entire chapter (Chapter 25) to a discussion of Owen's ideas and activities.

I have little recollection of the contents of that chapter (I discarded my copy of the book long ago), but the chapter must have made some impression on me because in the late 1960s my wife and I visited the Shaker community of Pleasant Hill in Kentucky; and by the early 1980s I was so convinced of the virtues of the communitarian option that I developed and published a strategy (or scenario, if you will)—consisting of 5 "waves"—for converting American society into one of eco-communities. Also, since then a friend and I have visited New Harmony, Indiana; the Strangite settlement Voree near Burlington, Wisconsin; Bishop Hill in Illinois; and we have plans to visit the Mormon (and then Icarian) community of Nauvoo, in Illinois.

Until recently my interest in the communitarian option[2] has been primarily *sociological* and *psychological* in nature—although my 1984 article clearly had an *ecological* orientation. That is, I had early on become convinced that the ill-being problem, in its various manifestations, in our society—a problem that has seemingly grown more and more severe during my lifetime—could only be solved via societal system change. I may have picked up this conviction from my earlier reading about Robert Owen;[3] but as I have a longstanding interest in religion, it is also possible that I derived this conviction from some of the religious literature that I had read—although the only such literature of relevance that comes to mind at the moment is this one:

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[1] New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960.

[2] For a brief history of communitarianism (specifically a "timeline") see this.

[3] Alfred Eugene Bestor, Jr., in his carefully/thoroughly-researched *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian and Owenite Phases of Communitarian Socialism, 1663 – 1829* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950, p. 81) stated that "in the last analysis his [referring to Owen] was a system of logic with one sole postulate, *"that the character of man, is, without a single exception, always formed for him."* Bestor was quoting here from Owen's *A New View of Society*, 1814. What Owen was saying here is that the *nature of the society* within which one is raised and lives plays a huge role in affecting how one's "character"—i.e., general personal characteristics—develops.

[Robert Adamson](#) [1852 – 1902], in his "Moral Theory and Moral Practice" (1900)[4] noted (pp. 229 - 230)

> the remarkable discrepancy between the Christian code of morals and the actual practice of Christian communities. The discrepancy can hardly be denied, but it may be explained by insisting that the Christian teaching relates primarily to the formation of character; that it inculcates dispositions from which, if due opportunity be furnished, the duly conforming type of action would follow. It need hardly be pointed out how wide a field this explanation, if accepted, would yield for that most common weakness of human nature, self-deception. To suppose it possible that a human character can be moulded into the Christian dispositions and excellences of character, while it develops in and among institutions of life admittedly not framed upon the Christian model or adjusted to it, is to put at defiance all that we know of the interdependence of character and circumstance. Dispositions, and the objective counterparts of them, acknowledged modes of life, must always go together, and neither can be understood in separation from the other.

Adamson's point here was that to get moral behavior, it is not enough to *instruct* people to be moral (via sermons, for example—even if they focus on story-telling[5]); people need to be *living* in a *situation* that *conduces* moral behavior (from their earliest years, I would add). Living in such a situation would not, of course, *guarantee* that moral behavior would always be forthcoming from those involved, but would at least increase the *probability* that moral behavior would be a commonplace occurrence.

(Let me add here that Adamson was critical of Christianity—its *leaders* in particular, implicitly—for not recognizing the importance of "situation" in affecting behavior—moral and otherwise; but what Adamson himself failed to recognize is that as the Middle Ages were "[waning](#)," in large part because of the growing importance of commerce (as a result of explorations, "advances" in technology, etc.), what the changing economy in Europe needed was an intellectual "boost"—e.g., "a theology in which man's worldly ambitions were not just tolerated but encouraged."[6] Such a theology was developed by [Martin Luther](#) (the notion of a "[calling](#)") and [John Calvin](#). The *intentions* of Luther and Calvin were not, it would seem, to encourage "worldly ambitions,"[7] but the *effects* of their theologies were to so do. As Linden

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[4] In (pp. 212 – 242) *[Ethical Democracy: Essays in Social Dynamics](#)*, edited by Stanton Coit. London: Grant Richards, 1900.

[5] Stories stick in my mind, and provoke thought more readily, than do "straight" sermons.

[6] Eugene Linden, *[Affluence and Discontent: The Anatomy of Consumer Societies](#)*. New York: The Viking Press, 1979, p. 102.

[7] In fact, Linden (*op. cit.*, p. 102) added that "Luther would have been appalled at the worldly way in which his message took shape."

notes (*op. cit.*, p. 103), Christianity—with the rise of Protestantism—involved liberating the "entrepreneurial spirit" "by creating a psychic window between act and responsibility.") Ironically, then, Christianity itself—led by Protestantism—played an important role in the *secularization* of Western societies![8])

At the time when I wrote my 5-"wave" strategy, I was not aware that[9]

> [Cornelius] Blatchly's essay [*Essay on Common Wealth*, 1822]contained long excerpts from a work by Robert Owen, a Welshman with whom Blatchly had been in touch while making his own preparations. In *A New View of Society* (1813), Owen originated the idea that the capitalist system could be transformed by the creation of cooperative communities everywhere. Part agricultural and part industrial, all the unemployed could settle in them along with all former wage earners who wanted their freedom, producing for each others' needs and for exchange with the outside world. These cooperative villages would grow, spread and federate "in circles of tens, hundreds and thousands," eventually transforming the whole of society around the world. From inside the shell of "the old immoral world" a "new moral world" would arise, where all were free and equal and where true democracy would rule. He called this Socialism, adding a new word to the languages of the world, and founded the Association of All Classes of All Nations to try to bring it about through peaceful means.

That is, I had not realized that a common view among communitarians was that a society could be transformed by creating a "model" community which, in offering a highly desirable way of life, would quickly be copied by others—this process eventually resulting in a "conversion" of the entire society. In not being aware of this fact, I was also not aware that I was rejecting the "city on a hill" philosophy of earlier communitarians in favor of one that held that (a) societal conversion would *not* occur "automatically" after creating a model community, it being necessary, rather, (b) to create, and then implement, a *strategy* for accomplishing the transformation—which is what I then did (the *strategy-creation* part, that is).

In 1984 I was also not fully aware of the fact that although there had been numerous communitarian "experiments" in America over the years, most had been rather short-lived. Evidently I would have agreed, in 1984, with John Curl that (*op. cit.*, p. 283) "communalism is so deeply embedded in American history and mythology that it will almost surely attract and inspire future generations curious to experiment in better ways of living." For that's what I am proposing now! But for reasons that go beyond any stated by earlier communitarians—and with a sense of urgency that earlier communitarians would not have been able to muster, given that the situations that we humans face at present is unprecedented.

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[8] The classic works on this subject are Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930) and Richard H. Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926).

[9] John Curl, *For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2009, p. 285. Note that the link provided here is to all 505 pages of Curl's book!

In Section 5 of my *A Religion for Today* I discuss (a) global warming as an atmospheric phenomenon, (b) its implications for humans, (c) possible courses of action in addressing the problem, and (d) an assessment of each of those possible courses—concluding that only two of those possible courses have merit:

- Homesteading.

- Community-building—the communities involved being as self-sufficient as possible (in food production in particular), given that with societal collapse (which seems imminent within a few decades) self-sufficiency will be needed for survival.[10] If, that is, survival is even *possible*—not a sure thing, by any means! (Which possibility should not, however, deter us from at least *trying* to "save" ourselves.)

The facts regarding the seriousness of global warming reported in the above-mentioned Appendix are dire enough; but since writing that Appendix the facts regarding global warming have become increasingly worrisome:

1. The current level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere:

    Scientific instruments showed that the gas had reached an average daily level above 400 parts per million [[11]]—just an odometer moment in one sense, but also a sobering reminder that decades of efforts to bring human-produced emissions under control [*what* efforts??]are faltering.

    The best available evidence suggests the amount of the gas in the air has not been this high for at least three million years, before humans evolved, and scientists believe the rise portends large changes in the climate and the level of the sea.

2. Research in a Siberian crater:

    The future of a globally warmed world has been revealed in a remote meteorite crater in Siberia, where lake sediments recorded the strikingly balmy climate of the Arctic during the last period when greenhouse gas levels were as high as today.

    Unchecked burning of fossil fuels has driven carbon dioxide to levels not seen for 3m years when, the sediments show, temperatures were 8C higher than today, [[12]] lush forests covered the tundra and sea levels were up to 40m higher than today.

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[10] I should note that there are already numerous "intentional communities" in the United States, although few of them are *eco*-communities.

[11] A reading that has subsequently been revised downward—ever so slightly; see this.

[12] A point that should be added here is that it is somewhat misleading to compare the "8C higher" determined for the Siberian crater in question with the increase that is occurring today, for the increase

The relative slowing of global temperature rises over the past 15 years has led some researchers to suggest the climate is less sensitive to CO2 rises than current climate models suggest. But the record from Lake El'gygytgyn of a very warm Arctic when atmospheric CO2 levels were last at about 400 parts per million (ppm) indicates the opposite, according to Brigham Grette. "My feeling is we have underestimated the sensitivity, unless there are some feedbacks we don't yet understand or we don't get right in the models."

3. Extinction events:

Perhaps one of the most striking elements of the present extinction crisis is the fact that the majority of our closest relatives—the primates—are severely endangered. About 90 percent of primates—the group that contains monkeys, lemurs, lorids, galagos, tarsiers, and apes (as well as humans—live in tropical forests, which are fast disappearing. The IUCN [International Union for Conservation of Nature] estimates that almost 50 percent of the world's primate species are at risk of extinction. Overall, the IUCN estimates that half the globe's 5,491 known mammals are declining in population and a fifth are clearly at risk of disappearing forever with no less than 1,131 mammals across the globe classified as endangered, threatened, or vulnerable. In addition to primates, marine mammals—including several species of whales, dolphins, and porpoises—are among those mammals slipping most quickly toward extinction.

This is but a small sampling of the dire news that is beginning to appear almost daily regarding the threat to various life forms being presented by global warming. My only criticism of these reports is that scientists—with perhaps the exception of Britain's Kevin Anderson—tend to be downplaying the consequences of global warming for *humans*—the likelihood that global warming will wipe out most of the world's population within the next few decades—perhaps, e.g., 90%, as Anderson has been quoted[13] as saying.

Arthur Bestor, writing, 63 years ago, about the communitarian movement in the United States from 1663 – 1829, seemingly had good reason to state (*op. cit*., p. 2):

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in global mean that is occurring now involves important phenomena *in addition* to an increase in the earth's mean temperature—such phenomena as (a) an increase in the number of storms, (b) an increase in their severity, and (c) weather conditions that are increasingly erratic. These phenomena—in conjunction with other phenomena having their basis in global warming (such as increases in fires, diseases, and violence)—will make survival increasingly difficult for humans—perhaps to the point that our species (to say nothing of other species) will become extinct!

[13] This site says of Anderson that he is among the "warm mongers"—illustrating the fact that so many in our midst are prone to dismiss global warming with "cute" phrases, and unwilling (or perhaps *unable*) to understand the *nature* of global warming—e.g., the fact that it is a phenomenon that "feeds on itself." By that I mean that warming results in the melting of ice and snow, exposing more bare land, which absorbs short-wave energy from the sun and releases long-wave energy that further warms the atmosphere. Also, a point is reached where warming causes permafrost in the far north to thaw, thereby releasing methane gas (20 times more potent than carbon dioxide as a "greenhouse" gas), thereby further contributing to global warming. Once this process of heating reaches a "tipping point," change becomes rapid—so that trying to adapt to the changes becomes the only option available (with even *those* efforts possibly being futile, unfortunately).

No one at present would suggest that such experiments hold the clue to the future social structure of the world. In the past half-century or so, the small co-operative community has seemed backward- rather than forward-looking, a plan to stabilize life at a simpler level than that of contemporary society.

What Bestor could not have foreseen, however, is that by 2013 it had become clear—to those able to read the "handwriting on the wall"—that not only are *societies* (including most certainly American society) in danger of imminent collapse, but the very *continued existence of our species* is in question. It is reasonably clear at present that global warming will be decimating our society (among others, of course) within a matter of decades, there being no possibility now of preventing this from occurring.[14] Given that only a fool would look to our governments for "salvation," we must take matters into our own hands—and pursuing the communitarian option would seem to offer the best path to salvation. In having myself reached that conclusion, I devote the rest of this paper to presenting my ideas regarding how to proceed.

As I stated earlier, insofar as there is an answer (and there *isn't*, actually!) to the global warming threat, it lies with homesteading and communitarianism. Fewer problems would be associated with the former "answer" because it would just involve individual families (including one-member ones) (a) deciding to homestead, (b) acquiring the necessary land (if not already possessed), (c) learning the necessary knowledge, and developing the necessary skills, for successful homesteading, and then (d) proceeding with homesteading. However, given that we belong to a social species, and that honoring that tendency can not only bring one psychological well-being, but enable a continuation of some semblance of civilized existence, my preference is for the communitarian option—despite the fact that because a community would contain *several* families (including one-member ones), various problems related to interaction would need to be resolved for a given community to be viable.

A point that needs emphasis here, however, is that *both* options would involve one changing one's way of life drastically—and for that reason most would not find that change appealing, and would be reluctant to take either path, despite the fact that their life might depend on it. On the other hand, because both options would involve challenges, some might find one of the options attractive *precisely* because of that reason—in conjunction with the "pioneering" aspects of both options.

In referring to a "community" here I am referring specifically to an *intentional* community—i.e., a community created (i.e., designed and/or constructed) by its future residents. Hypothetically, this can occur in one of two ways:

- A given individual (a) decides that s/he desires to initiate such a community (rather than moving to an existing such community—for whatever reasons), (b) convinces some

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[14] Geoengineering efforts may be engaged in to prevent further global warming, but such efforts are suspect in that they involve the same hubris that got us into our current dangerous situation—and may *themselves* be dangerous.

friends and/or acquaintances to join in, (c) the group then planning a community for themselves, (d) purchasing the necessary land, and then (e) proceeding to create the community (or have it created).

- A given individual (a) reaches the conclusion that a communitarian movement would be desirable, and then (b) decides to initiate a program for developing such communities. If the individual is able to finance such a program, s/he then (c) proceeds to develop the program; but if s/he lacks the financial ability to initiate the program, s/he then (d) seeks funding from a foundation, rich individual, etc.

I place myself in the second category, although I have made no concerted effort to date to seek funding for the program that I would either (a) like to see initiated or (b) like to myself initiate.

Assuming the latter, my "vision" of a program would involve first acquiring a facility that would house program participants during the planning process—one of my basic assumptions here being that careful attention must be given to the planning phase, to ensure agreement among the participants as to (a) the purpose(s) of the program and (b) the detailed characteristics sought for the community. Obviously, once a community had actually been created the residents would be in a better position to evaluate the decisions they had made regarding community characteristics, and might therefore decide to *modify* those characteristics in a direction agreeable to all of the residents.[15] But it is essential that during the planning phase careful attention is given to all issues related to the community's characteristics, with tentative agreement on the part of all participants on all of those issues.

Given that for the Program Director the first decision to make would be that of choosing, and then acquiring, a facility to house participants during the planning phase, before such a decision could be made the Director would need to decide on:

- The *personal characteristics* needed by the potential participants (i.e., attitudes, beliefs, skills, knowledge, etc.).

- The *number* of participants—for the facility in question would need to be large enough to house the participants, be able to accommodate planning sessions—and have some space left over for future expansion.

- The *location* of the facility should be such that it would be relatively close to sites where communities would be created—to provide residents of a future community a place to live while their community was being constructed (given that at least some of the future residents would likely be involved in the construction process).

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[15] If agreement cannot be obtained by all participants, and those disagreeing with the majority regard their disagreement as being highly significant, they can choose to discontinue their involvement with the program.

The 5-"wave" strategy/scenario that I published in 1984 (a link to which is provided above) had retirees constituting the first and second "waves," and I continue to believe in the wisdom of initiating a program with retirees (ones in good health, of course!):

- The fact that retirees would lack dependents would enable their creation of a community involving less detail and fewer considerations than if the participants *did* have dependents.

- Retirees would have incomes independent of employment, enabling them more readily to make a decision to become a participant in a community-building program.[16]

- A program to create *retirement* communities—albeit ones with special characteristics—would likely be more attractive to retirees than a program to create communities with varying ages.

As to the ideal size of group to work with—at the beginning, at any rate—I would place that number at 12 – 15 "people units" (i.e., couples and singles). Once the Program Director had gained experience with community-building efforts, s/he could expand this number.[17] Doing so might, of course, necessitate either expanding the size of the facility used to house participants, or moving to a more commodious facility.

After a facility for the program had been acquired, the next step would be to seek participants for the program—but this presumes that the *nature* of the program had been clearly set forth, so that potential participants could be informed about this. An advertisement for the program would, on the one hand, need to be *truthful*, but, on the other hand, would also need to make the program *inviting* enough to be able to attract participants.

My perception of the nature of the necessary program is such that there would be somewhat of a "tightwire" to walk on regarding this matter. What I mean in saying that is that on the one hand enough details would need to be conveyed to potential participants to give them a clear basis for making the decision to become a participant. On the other hand, however, an important principle, I believe, is to allow participants to have a significant opportunity to make decisions affecting the "shape" of the community that they are planning for themselves. What I am suggesting here is that there are two factors that would make a communitarian program attractive to potential participants—(a) knowledge regarding those *features of the community* to be created that are likely to be important to them, and (b) the knowledge that they will be making important decisions as to the "shaping" of the community.

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[16] A part of a retiree's income would be used to pay rent to the community, thereby providing income to the community to meet various expenses. As a point would be reached—perhaps after the lifetimes of those creating the community—when the society would collapse, rendering money worthless, while the community *was* receiving money it would use it to move in the direction of self-sufficiency, so that when it *needed* to be fully self-sufficient, it would be *able* to so be.

[17] For a discussion of the virtues of smallness see Kirkpatrick Sale's (rather large!) *Human Scale* (2007).

What the preceding paragraph suggests, then, is that it is first necessary to make clear to potential participants "what they would be getting into" in becoming a participant in the program, and I would tentatively suggest the following as among the possible "facts" of this sort:

- The *primary* reason for creating a community would be to give its residents somewhat of a chance to survive the ravages of global warming.[18] Granted that the *participants themselves* might die prior to global warming causing our society to collapse; but they would be acting as a *vanguard*, paving the way for posterity—their descendants and others.

- The community would be *located* with global warming in mind—e.g., away from the oceans.[19] Given that the location of the *Program's* facility was made with global warming in mind, this issue would therefore be a non-issue.

- It should be located away from major urban areas: When the society begins to collapse, there will be many desperate people out searching for food; although one can sympathize with the plight of these people, the fact of the matter is that the community created for a group would be designed to support *that group only*—so that it would not be in a position to offer food to (many) desperate people. Being away from major urban areas would reduce the likelihood of coming in contact with such people.

- The community should be designed to be esthetically pleasing—with artificiality being kept to a minimum (so that, e.g., there would be no manicured lawns).

- The community would be *constructed* with global warming in mind—e.g., able to withstand wind and hail damage, and even tornado damage (at least by having underground space to which the residents could go for protection during a tornado event).

- It would take advantage of *site* features (e.g., locations that might make earth-sheltering possible and advantageous, southward-facing slopes, etc.)

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[18] The presence of the word "ark" in "Cape Cod Ark Bioshelter" is an obvious allusion to the ark that Noah was said to have built, in preparation of the destruction, by flood, of all living things by "God." The community-building being advocated in this paper might also be thought of as "ark building" with, however, (a) "global warming" (in its various manifestations) replacing "flood," (b) "human actions" being the relevant causal factor rather than "God," and (c) "human stupidity" (and the inertial of societal systems), rather than "human evil," being the basic reason for the onset of global warming.

[19] The fact that I was born and raised in south-central Wisconsin, and now live in the Milwaukee area, likely biases my views on this matter, but I am convinced that Wisconsin offers a number of possible sites for the program I envision (unlike Oklahoma, for example!)—and the communities that would be created as a result of that program.

- The community's real property—land and buildings—would be community owned (the details of this ownership to be worked out by prospective residents). This would enable the maintenance of the community's integrity as a community.

- An effort should be made to have the residents all live in the same building—to enable the heating of the building to be done as efficiently as possible, to enable ready interaction with other members of the community, etc.[20] Each "family unit" would have its own private living quarters, however.

- The community would be designed to be as self-sufficient[21] as possible (in food production especially), with the aim of making the community progressively more self-sufficient over time. On the other hand, with a proliferation of communities, a point would be reached where some degree of specialization might occur, with trade occurring among nearby communities.

- Given that increasingly erratic weather conditions are to be expected, as global warming "picks up steam," an emphasis should be placed on "greenhouse farming." Sustenance activities would be under the community's control, with individual members of a community being involved in making decisions relative to those activities, and supplying the labor necessary to do them (being given credit for so doing, computed in terms of amount of time).

- An effort would be made to make a given community as efficient as possible in its operations. Thus, a "cafeteria" would be provided, and the residents would be encouraged to use this rather than have fully-equipped kitchens that would enable them to prepare their own meals. The goal of efficiency would not, however, be pushed to the extreme of preventing residents from making many of the decisions affecting their personal lives: Excessive intrusiveness in one's life would be avoided to the extent possible—there being, of course, somewhat of a conflict between realizing this goal and realizing the goal of efficiency.

- The Structured Interaction Group institution used for the planning process would continue to be used once the community was in operation. The fact that participation in a SIG might lead to an altered state of consciousness with one or more participants during a given session might very well lead to harmonious relationships within the community.

- The attitude that one is neither inferior, nor superior, to others should be encouraged—SIG participation helping mold such an attitude with residents. It should also help one be empathetic toward not only one's fellow residents, but others in general.

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[20] This is in conformance with Charles Fourier's *phalanstère* concept.

[21] There are two motives behind this principle: (1) When the society begins to collapse within a few decades, those living in self-sufficient communities will have the best chance to survive; (2) being self-sufficient helps to "starve the beast"—i.e., contribute to the Larger Society's demise.

- Residents would be encouraged to learn about the Discrepancy concept, and to read Chapters 2 – 4 in my eBook, *What Are Churches* For*?* to learn different perspectives on our "design specifications" as humans, thereby helping residents continually to improve their interactions with other community members. Members of a given community would not merely be "survivalists" obsessed with surviving global warming, but concerned with the well-being of their fellow community members and others.

- The residents of a given community would be thought of as constituting a sort of extended family, but one based on similar interests rather than biological relationship. *How* this principle got implemented would be a matter decided by a community's future residents. I stated in an earlier essay: "I am convinced that the fundamental reason why our society has become so inegalitarian is that the household is our fundamental societal unit." Given that I foresee the communities in question as renewing the relatively egalitarian situation within which our ancestors lived, this implies that the nuclear family—a rather recent invention—while still retained, would take a "back seat" to the *community*[22] as the fundamental societal unit.[23]

- Being a music lover myself (classical music, and such singers as Judy Collins, Dido, and Roger Whitaker), I am impressed with this statement:

  > What enthralled him [Paolo Lugari[24]] about that historic Paraguayan experiment [engaged in by Jesuits in the 17th century] was the music. "Everyone," he told [Dr. Gustavo[25]] Yepes, "was taught to sing or to play a musical instrument. Music was the loom that wove the community together. Music was in school, at meals, even at work: Musicians accompanied laborers right into the corn and *yerba mate* fields. They'd take turns, some playing, some harvesting. It was a society that lived in constant harmony—literally.[26]

  What it suggests to me is that music should be encouraged in any community created—for it has potential of being a "loom" that weaves the various strands of a community into a solidary community.

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[22] Thus, a community would be more than a mere "homestead colony"—a type of settlement promoted by Ralph Borsodi in the early 1900s.

[23] In two of my essays (part 1 and part 2) I argued that it is useful to think of the Good Society as being comparable to a human body.

[24] The man who was the main person instrumental in establishing the village of Gaviotas in Colombia.

[25] Director of the faculty of music at Universidad de Los Andes, in Bogatá, Colombia.

[26] Alan Weisman, *Gaviotas: A Village to Reinvent the World*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 1998, p. 10.

I am hoping that the above statements are sufficient to convince a significant number of retirees to consider becoming participants in the program being proposed here. I would add to the point above regarding the possible role of music, that I believe that SIG participation also has the possibility of producing solidarity in program participants, a sense of solidarity that they will carry over to their residence in their community, once built—provided, that is, that they continue to use the SIG for decision-making (for socialization, etc.), and give music an important role in their community.

Let me leave you with this statement, also drawn from the book on Gaviotas (*op. cit.*, p. 83):

> [Jorge] Zapp[27] looked almost sheepish. "At that moment, it struck me that without even trying, we've been creating another kind of world here. It's based on solidarity: one in which no one knows when he'll be paid for what he does, let along get rich. It may just be survival, but it's survival in the best sense of the word: People surviving as considerate, sharing beings. No one demands anything of anybody except to get along with each other and work hard, in cooperation. We do this simply because we love to. In Gaviotas, we're driven by something different than compensation or pecking orders. And we're content here. Whatever this is, it can't be underestimated."

Gaviotas is not *utopia* (i.e., no place, literally); rather it is a *topia*—a *real* place, as Lugari insists, and that fact that it *is* a real place should be sufficient to convince at least *some* retirees that they need not fear becoming participants in the proposed program. What I suspect, rather, is that those who choose to become participants will begin *living* for the first time in their lives!

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[27] A leader at Gaviotas, who had been head of the mechanical engineering department at Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia.

Can "Ought" be Derived From "Is"?

Alton C. Thompson

Scottish philosopher/historian David Hume (1711 – 1776) is famous for discussing the "is-ought" problem,[1] which is

> that many writers make claims about what *ought* to be on the basis of statements about what *is*. However, Hume found that there seems to be a significant difference between descriptive statements (about what is) and prescriptive or normative statements (about what ought to be), and it is not obvious how one can get from making descriptive statements to prescriptive. The is–ought problem is also known as **Hume's law** and **Hume's Guillotine**.

The question of whether "ought" can be derived from "is" "has become one of the central questions of ethical theory." Given that I am not a philosopher, and therefore am poorly versed in arguments "pro" and "con" on this matter, it is perhaps foolish of me to add my "two cents" to the matter. But here goes anyway!

I suppose that my own view relative to this question is a species of "ethical naturalism," in the sense that I believe "that inquiry into the natural world can increase our moral knowledge in just the same way it increases our scientific knowledge." My approach to the problem *may*, however, [2] be novel, given that it derives from *evolutionary* thinking—a sort of thinking that has developed primarily after Hume's death (in 1776). However, to assert that my perspective derives from evolutionary thinking, is *not* to say that it owes anything to Charles Darwin, his *The Origin of Species* (1859) in particular. As this point is of some importance to my discussion, let me begin here by quoting what Darwin had to say about the most important concept associated with his name, "natural selection":

As I have discussed Darwin's concept of "natural selection" in detail elsewhere," here I will simply summarize the concept in my own words:

- With any species the individuals comprising the species vary in their characteristics (at birth).

- With any species more are born than can survive (a "principle" that Darwin derived from "Rev. Thomas Malthus [1766 – 1834]).

- This situation produces intra-specific competition, especially on the part of the just born.

- Those individuals having characteristics that enable them to survive this competition do so, with at least some of them later producing progeny.

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- This process, occurring over time, results in genetic change in the species (i.e., monotypic evolution)—in terms of the "success variable" and any other variables that happen to be correlated with that variable.

Beginning with the fifth edition of *Origin* (there were six editions during Darwin's lifetime), used the phrase "survival of the fittest"—borrowed, he acknowledged, from Herbert Spencer—to refer to the survivors of this competition. Although the term "fittest" in this phrase seemingly suggests that Darwin was referring to fitting the *physical environment*, it is clear from his discussion of "natural selection" that he was referring to what might be termed the "sociological" environment—the "characteristic set" of those conspecifics with whom one was competing.

Evidently, this fact was not only *recognized* by Darwin's contemporaries but then *used* by some of them to argue that because intraspecific competition was "natural," it was therefore "good"—a conclusion that led to the development of Social Darwinism—an ideology that came to be applied at both intra- and inter-societal scales. The problem with this ideology is that its factual basis is in error, so that the "ought" derived from it is baseless.

In stating that my own perspective on the "is" / "ought" matter derives from evolutionary thinking, but is "non-Darwinian," what I mean is that (a) on the one hand our species has developed over an extremely long period of time, but that (b) on the other hand during a given segment of time (say, 20,000 years) the changes have tended to be of a minor nature, so that (d) during such a period we became "designed":

- To receive certain *stimuli*, and not others.

- To engage in certain *behaviors* (including relative to the other members of our group), and not others.

- To use our *brains* for certain sorts of *thinking*, and not others.

That is, during such a period a *consonance* developed between our (a) biological nature and (b) our way of life. Biological changes would impact on way of life, just as way of life changes would impact on biology; but during a "brief" period of time little change in either would occur.

The Agricultural Revolution of roughly 10,000 years ago involved applying the human intellect, as it had developed to that point (while some sort of *gatherer-hunter* way of life existed, its *nature* varying with geographical location) to *sustenance* activities initially, but doing so had as side effects (a) changes in the nature of settlement (e.g., becoming sedentary), as well as (b) changes in inter-personal relationships within a group and (c) growth in size of the group. Given that humans, during the gathering-hunting phase of their existence, had become "designed" to receive certain stimuli, engage in certain behaviors, and use their brains in certain ways, the

changes associated with the Agricultural Revolution involved changes in stimuli, etc., so that a Discrepancy began to arise between (a) the way of life for which they had become "designed" and (b) the way of life that they were now living (*forced* to live, in most cases). What made the emergence of this Discrepancy inevitable was that the changes that were occurring in way of life were too rapid for biology to "catch up" (which led sociobiologist David P. Barash to label biology the "tortoise" and way of the life the "hare" in this process.

Although Barash apparently first used the term "discrepancy," it appears that Wisconsin-born Thorstein Veblen (1857 – 1929) was the *originator* of the concept (see pp. 41 – 46 in my *What Are Churches* For*?*). Veblen did not, though, *develop* the concept, instead simply making somewhat random comments on the matter in some of his works.

My interest in the Discrepancy concept is, however, not so much in its *origin* as in the fact that fundamental to the concept is that humans have certain "design specifications" which (a) developed during the gatherer-hunter phase of our existence, and (b) are still possessed by us—although our ways of life are now discordant with those "specs."

That fact of discordance presumably has several implications (which I identify in *What Are . . .*), but it should first be noted that "design specifications" itself lacks an "objective" meaning—a point that should be clear from the fact that I identify and discuss nine perspectives on the matter in Chapter 3 of *What Are . . .* (using Chapter 4 to present my own views on the subject). This lack of "objectivity" may be of concern to some, but not to me for my interest is less in "truth" than in that which people agree on—so that to bring in one of main concerns, that of seeing a communitarian option being realized, those creating an eco-community for themselves are welcome to discuss these various perspectives and then come to conclusions that are *meaningful to them*.

To return, however, to the matter at hand—that of deriving "ought" from "is": I have no problem in arguing that our "design specifications" as humans—as agreed upon in the manner specified above—*do* provide us with a basis for "ought." The basis for my argument here is that (a) living in accord with one's "design specifications" means a high level of physical and psychological well-being, (b) that is a "good" in itself, and additionally "good" because (c) it means that pathological behaviors—including those detrimental to the well-being of others—will be minimized.

I argue in *What Are . . .* that the ancient Hebrew prophets were individuals who (a) sensed that a Discrepancy existed in their society, (b) recognized that the ill-being caused in many by this Discrepancy was "unnatural," and (c) because they attributed this widespread ill-being to actions of the elite, they (d) directed their "prophetic" remarks to such individuals. Although those remarks did not bear much fruit (i.e., change in elite behavior), one result was the creation of laws (discussed in Chapter 1 of *What Are . . .*) directed especially at the elite—which body of laws also bore little fruit. Despite that (latter) fact, their existence, in conjunction with the fact of

their (relative) fruitlessness, leads us to ask: What was the *intent* of those laws? And given that intent, Was the creation of laws the best *means* for *achieving* that intent?

What's clear about *intent* is that it was a return to a way of life in which the well-being of all is a "given"—although the prophets could not have expressed their intent that way because evolutionary thinking was still "down the road." And *because* the early prophets could not have known this, they also could not have known that creating laws would not accomplish the desired "return," only *societal system change* would. (See p. 38 in *What Are . . .*, however.)

This fact that *societal system change* (of the right sort, of course!) is what's needed if the goal of universal well-being is to be achieved suggests that "ought" has traditionally been thought of too narrowly—in terms of *rules/laws* for governing the behavior of individuals (and groups), rather than *changing the context within which people live their lives*. And this narrowness in our thinking of "ought" may be a factor in why, today, we are unable to come to grips with the primary problem facing us now, the threat posed by global warming—with the various phenomena associated with "global warming" likely to severely decimate the world's population within a few decades, perhaps to the point of extinction!

As I have been arguing on these pages, although there is no good answer to this threat, the best alternative is the eco-communitarian one—a "solution" which, if followed, would involve societal system change. One would think that the "isness" of the present—the global warming threat—would result in a widely agreed-upon "ought"—we ought to do something pronto, such as working for societal system change—but apparently we are stuck with "juvenile" brains that won't allow us to recognize the mess that we have created for ourselves.

If *that's* the case, it does not bode well for our future as a species!

Endnotes

1. This is a problem that "Hume discusses . . . in book III, part I, section I of his book, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739)."

2. Not being familiar with the literature in this area, I don't know if others have already used the reasoning that I use here.

The Abuse of Power: Another Dimension
Alton C. Thompson

It has been well said recently that (Sheldon Richman) "power is inherently abusive" and (Christopher H. Pyle)

> Many people believe that they have nothing to fear from government/corporate surveillance because they have nothing to hide. But every bureaucracy is a solution in search of a problem, and if it can't find a problem to fit its solution, they will redefine the problem. In the 1960s, the surveillance bureaucracies redefined anti-war and civil rights protests as communist enterprises; today the same bureaucracies redefine anti-war Quakers, environmentalists, and animal rights activists as "terrorists." So political activists, no matter how benign, have good reasons to fear these bureaucracies.

Richman added:

> Lord Acton's dictum—"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely"—is only liberalism's the most famous statement of distrust. Before Acton, David Hume, one of the giants of the Scottish Enlightenment, noted,
>
>> Political writers have established it as a maxim, that, in contriving any system of government, and fixing the several checks and controuls of the constitution, every man ought to be supposed a *knave,* and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private interest. By this interest we must govern him, and, by means of it, make him, notwithstanding his insatiable avarice and ambition, co-operate to public good. Without this, say they, we shall in vain boast of the advantages of any constitution, and shall find, in the end, that we have no security for our liberties or possessions, except the good-will of our rulers; that is, we shall have no security at all.

These statements were made with reference to our loss of privacy rights made public several days ago by Edward Snowden.

Economists, especially those of a *laissez-faire* persuasion (see this and this), tend to perceive increased size in positive terms ("economies of scale," the "productive use of resources," etc.), ignoring the fact that as increases in organization size occurs, this involves (a) a "deskillification" of people (in the sense that a variety of general skills comes to be replaced with a few specialized skills), (b) increased dependence, and (c) therefore the tendency for an exploitation of some members of a society by other members.

This recognition, by individuals such as Richman, Pyle—and Snowden, of course—of power as a *problem*, with it having a tendency of becoming—virtually inevitably—a problem in large organizations is all "fine and dandy" (as a co-worker of mine has a tendency of saying). What is

absent in current discussions of power, and its evils, however, is its relevance for the primary problem we humans face at present—the threat posed by global warming to the very continued existence of our species.

A concentration of power *could*, conceivably, be useful for addressing this problem—quickly, and in meaningful ways. But when power is concentrated, it is unlikely to be used to serve the common good. Why not? Those in positions of power tend:

- To "achieve" such positions because they are driven by a control mentality, and therefore *seek* power—and often obtain it.

- To—if they have been "thrust" into positions of power by factors over which they have not exerted control—be be "corrupted" by the power that they now find themselves possessing.

One with power—however obtained—will tend not only to *abuse* that power—the point that currently is being emphasized; one with power will also tend to *become* abused—in the sense the person's intellectual abilities will tend to be (for want of a better term) "subverted." That is, the individual's mind will tend to become "possessed" by *ideological* notions that prevent him or her from perceiving what the rest of us perceive. In addition, some of the lackeys of those with tremendous power may become engaged in efforts deliberately to misinform the public (in part through the practice of language perversion) regarding vital issues—further ensuring that those issues get "swept under the rug." Ironically, as the (incorrect) story of ostriches hiding their heads in the sand to make a problem go away, the fact that one is misinformed about a problem will not make it go away. (The image to the left is from this site.)

This combination of (a) having power and (b) being out of touch with "reality" can be a deadly combination—especially today, when global warming threatens to enter a "runaway" phase within a few decades (assuming that it hasn't already!).

Is it any wonder that some of us—perhaps especially those of us with children and grandchildren (I have four so far, with another due in September)—have difficulty sleeping at night, fearful of what the future will be bringing, and feeling virtually helpless to do anything about it? Perhaps

someone with substantial power will come to his or her senses . . . ., but I am not going to "hold my breath" waiting!

Our Problem With Violence

Alton C. Thompson

June 12, 2013 | On Monday in Ohio, animal control Officer Barry Accorti shot and killed a litter of kittens in front of freaked-out children nearby.

[The children of the woman who called the officer] were upstairs in view of the windows. They started screaming and crying because they heard the gunshots. They started screaming, 'Mommy, he's killing the kittens,'" [Teresa] Landon [Ohio SPCA [1] Executive Director] said, "It's heartbreaking… There is no excuse for it. It's absolutely shameful that someone with the title of humane officer would do this."

At a recent family get-together (in honor of an uncle who had turned 80), the "big news" that my sister (who lives in a small city in south-central Wisconsin) reported is that a white-tailed doe had recently given birth to two fawns under her house's deck: How pleased she felt that she had been honored by this 'blessed event" occurring on her property, and how excited her neighbors had been as they viewed, and took pictures of, mother and babies.

I thought of my sister's wonderful experience as I read about the police officer's disgusting action, as reported in the epigraph above; and the two events together brought to mind the fact that although people are very different, the *prevailing* view seems to be that humans are "naturally" violent—a view commented upon in a book chapter that I read last night: [2]

The mere existence of a substantial number of internally peaceful and nonwarring societies is important, because it challenges a set of assumptions about the naturalness of violence and the inevitability of war. Such assumptions have a long history in Western thought and are reflected in a batch of recent books (e.g., Ghiglieri, 1999, Keeley, 1996, Wrangham & Peterson, 1996), which place great emphasis on the human capacity for violence, sometimes in melodramatic terms: "We live in a world in which cheaters, robbers, rapists, murderers, and warmongers lurk in every human landscape" (Ghiglieri, 1999, p. 246).

As the authors point out, believing that humans are naturally violent is not merely an erroneous belief; it is a belief that may be *acted* upon, so that it becomes a "self-fulfilling prophecy." The authors quote from David P. Barash 's *Introduction to Peace Studies* (1991, p. 22) to make this point:

If war is considered inevitable, and societies therefore prepare to fight—for example, by drafting an army, procuring weapons that threaten their neighbors, following a bellicose foreign

policy—war may well result. And that fact will then be cited as proof that the war was inevitable from the start; moreover, it will be used to justify similar behavior in the future.

(Another example of the utter venality of our leaders, especially, and the lackeys that they engage to convince the rest of us of war's necessity—my use of the word "venality" being deliberate here; for given that wars make millionaires, it should be obvious that wars are fought primarily to "line the pockets" of certain people, rather than the "reasons" claimed, and it's difficult to believe that our political leaders—who themselves, though, seem more motivated by a desire to appear "tough"—are not aware of this fact.)

The authors note (p. 176) that rather than thinking in terms of "peaceful" and "warlike"—i.e., thinking in *dichotomous* terms—it is important to recognize that societies vary along a *continuum*. The reason for this is that a variety of factors affect the behaviors of individuals and societies, not just hereditary tendencies. [3] For the authors, however, the important point is that there *are* numerous examples of basically peaceful societies (their Appendix lists 49—from Amish to Zapotec "La Paz"), and *that* fact proves that (p. 193) "humans have a substantial capability to prevent, limit, and handle conflicts non-violently. The existence of peaceful societies shows that violence and warfare are not inevitable."

The fate of slavery, in the Western world, the authors argue, provides us with some degree of optimism for reducing the amount of violence in the world. For (p. 194), "Historically, slavery was widely accepted, then progressively challenged, and ultimately abolished." The question that that point raises, however, is whether violence is as "ripe" for elimination as was slavery in the mid 1800s. Not that it was *inevitable* that slavery would be abolished (although that it would, eventually, seems rather certain), but the war fought relative to their freeing involved a variety of factors/motives, and I'm not convinced that a sufficient parallel exists between why slavery was ended and why the same might occur with violence today.

At any rate, the authors use the abolition of slavery to show (p. 194) that "even widely held beliefs and solidly entrenched social institutions can change," and then ask: "Why could we not set up new regional and global social institutions to deal effectively with conflict without military force?" Yes, indeed, why not?!

I have two problems with this "proposal"-of-sorts. First, I perceive no groundswell of support for the creation of such institutions—in large part because the members of what David Sirota has called "Permanent Washington" evince no support for such a proposal, and use their positions to convince the populace to accept the "obvious" truths that they espouse (in the case of pundits) and act upon (in the case of political leaders).

Second, the proposal is "narrow-minded" in that it implies that the only problem facing us humans at present is that of *violence* in its various forms. That is, the authors present a point of view for which their *specialty* qualifies them, but that fact leads us to ask: Is their specialty the most important one, or even *an* important one?

I, for one, *do* regard their specialty as an important one. However, it seems to me that the most important problem facing us humans at present is the threat of *global warming*—which has the potential of virtually wiping out our species, perhaps even rendering it extinct, within a few decades.

I agree with the authors that (p. 194) we should "take the challenging task of thinking afresh about how to create new institutions;" but whereas the authors continue that statement by saying "that would provide security and resolve international conflicts without recourse to war," I would say:

> We need to recognize that the "progress" of global warming to date has been such that it is no longer possible to prevent "runaway" from occurring. That means that our only hope lies in trying to *adapt*, as best we can, to the changes that will inevitably occurring—a point increasingly regarded as having great merit. Thus, rather than thinking of "new institutions" being ones created with international conflicts in mind, I propose that those "new institutions" be eco-communities.

As I have "beat this horse" (!) in numerous previous essays, I will say nothing further here about that proposal—except to add that as "runaway" causes societies to collapse and a severe culling of the world's population to occur, (a) it's likely that a great deal of violence will accompany the changes that are in the offing, but that (b) movement in an eco-communitarian direction holds the potential of allowing those who *do* survive to create societies having far fewer problems— including that of violence—than our societies have at present.

Endnotes

1. For Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

2. From (p. 192) Chapter 7 ("Lessons for the Rest of Us: Learning From Peaceful Societies," by Bruce D. Bonta and Douglas P. Fry, in (pp. 175 – 210) *The Psychology of Resolving Global Conflicts: From War to Peace*, Volume 1: *Nature vs. Nurture*, edited by Mari Fitzduff and Chris E. Stout. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2005. Dr. Fry kindly supplied me with a .pdf copy of this chapter.

3. It is of interest, however, that Chapter 3 in *Nonkilling Societies*, edited by Joám Evans Pim, is entitled "Nonkilling as an Evolutionary Adaptation." Note that the link here is to the *book itself*, not a *review* of it!

Dowd's List(s)

Alton C. Thompson

I haven't written a book report in decades, but recently, in learning about Michael Dowd's *Thank God for Evolution: How the Marriage of Science and Religion Will Transform Your life and Our World* (2008), I thought that I might find the book of some interest and value. I therefore went to the Amazon web site, found a seller willing to sell a copy for a penny (!)—plus $3.99 for shipping and handling—and ordered the book. I just completed reading the book, and now offer a review of the book.

Let me first note that the book is unusual for the number of endorsements listed in the book itself—six pages at the beginning (pp. i – vi) and five pages at the end (pp. 417 – 23)! What this *seems* to indicate is that numerous intellectual and religious leaders think highly of the book, but what aspects of Dowd's *biography* suggest—to me, at least!—is that this profusion of endorsements may, rather, reflect a deep sense of insecurity/inferiority on Dowd's part. Judge for yourself about the book's value—using, e.g., this review of the book in so doing.

Although raised as a Roman Catholic (p. 1), Dowd attended (p. 415) a university—Evangel University—associated with the Assemblies of God denomination (to which *I* was exposed as a youngster, by the way), and then attended Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. After his seminary training, he pastored three United Church of Christ churches in Massachusetts, Ohio, and Michigan.[1]

He admits (p. 1) that while a teenager he "struggled with alcohol, drugs, and sex," but that while in the army (in Germany, in 1979) was "born again." At some point he married his first wife, Alison, had three children with her (p.371), but does not indicate how they met, when he got married, when he divorced, or why. His earlier statement (p. 345)—"Acting irresponsibly on my instincts led me to betray the trust of both of my wives and also cost me my pastoral ministry in the mid 1990s"—suggests that at some time after his divorce and remarriage (to his current wife, Connie) he committed certain undisclosed indiscretions, which resulted in the termination of his ministerial position—but not a second divorce.

Dowd then began (p. 415) working with various religious leaders "on environmental issues that were coming up for a vote in Congress" (as an employee of National Environmental Trust), and from 1997 to 2000 headed the Portland (Oregon) Sustainable Lifestyle Campaign. He (p. 416) continued "this work for two more years by serving as campaign manager of Global Action Plan's EcoTeam and Livable Neighborhood programs in Rockland Country, New York." Since 2002, however, (p. 4) "Connie and I have been full-time 'evolutionary evangelists.' We live permanently on the road, offering a spiritually nourishing view of evolution throughout North

America." Prior to 2002, however, (and even since?) Dowd was evidently involved (p. 345) in "years of recovery work," and on p. 372 he acknowledges "the vital personal support given by my companions in recovery . . ."[2]

These statements by, and about, him suggest that:

- His initial "born again" experience did not "take" very well (i.e., his later divorce, and still later indiscretions).

- He attributes the indiscretion(s) that led to the cessation of his earlier ministry to his "instincts" only ("free will" not being involved, evidently!). That is, he does not take personal responsibility for those discretions.

- His current "itinerant" joint ministry with wife Connie—with its (he claims) "spiritually nourishing view of evolution" (!)—*may* partially have its basis in an inability to obtain a regular pastoral position!

My choice of "Dowd's List(s)" for this essay is an obvious allusion to "Schindler's List," a movie in which industrialist Oskar Schindler (played by Liam Neeson) is responsible for the "salvation" (from death) of a number of Polish Jews. Dowd—associated with an activity *also* involving salvation (but of the "soul"—from an afterlife in a rather unpleasant place, it's alleged)—*also* has a list, but it is *plural*; and rather than consisting of people he has helped "save," they identify individuals who have *contributed* to the development of his ideas:

- On pp. 275-76 he lists Epic of Evolution pioneers Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, etc.; evolutionary psychology/brain science writers Robert Wright, Stephen Pinker, etc.; Ken Wilbur's Integral Institute; eclectic writings by Matthew Fox, Duane Elgin, Loyal Rue, etc.; the theological reflections of Denis Edwards, Leonardo Boff, etc.; Emerging Church leaders such as Jim Burklo, Brian McLaren, etc.; etc.

- In his Acknowledgements section (pp. 371 – 73) he thanks his parents and siblings, first wife and their three children, and various people involved in the book's preparation—noting that his (current) wife, Connie, played a major role in shaping the book's content.

In his Acknowledgements section he begins, however, by asserting "I did not write this book. God did. To claim it as mine would be the height of arrogance." He goes on to say: "'God did it' is a poetic way of saying that this bouncing baby you hold in your hands was birthed through me, but it took the entire body of life to conceive and write it." Which strikes me as a rather arrogant claim! (By the way, I recently learned that God is a Methodist, in attending the movie 42 with my younger daughter on Father's Day!: "He's a Methodist," says [Branch] Rickey [of Jackie Robinson, the famous baseball player who broke the "color" barrier, in the movie]. "I'm a Methodist. God's a Methodist.")

31

The title of Dowd's book contains both the words "God" and "evolution," and a useful starting point here is to examine the meanings that Dowd attaches to these two words—beginning with "God." That this is an important word in the book is indicated by the fact that in his Index he lists, under "God," (p. 401) 39 subentries—from "belief in vs. experience of" to "moral character of" to "as understood through day or night language." [3]

Evidently Dowd would like us to believe that he thinks of "God" not only as the "entire body of life" (as he expressed his concept of God in the Acknowledgements section), but as (p. 85) "Ultimate Reality"—"the One and Only Whole (Holy One) that is not part of some larger, more comprehensive reality." One would like to think that this statement means something rather specific to Dowd, but Dowd fails to make "perfectly clear" what the *nature* of this Ultimate Reality is. After all, the meaning of "Ultimate Reality" is not self-evident!

In his "God or the Universe: What's in a Name?" subsection (pp. 126 – 28) he seems to say that there are *pragmatic* reasons for referring to the Universe as "God." He states (p. 127), "If . . . we regard the Ultimate Wholeness of Reality as divine and choose to use the word 'God' as a sacred proper name for that Whole, then our terminology itself will incline us (and those who come after us) to honor Nature and to learn all that we can from Her (or Him, or It)." Dowd seems to have derived this notion from [Gregory Bateson], because he had just quoted a famous statement by Bateson in which the "snowball in hell" phrase occurs.

Unfortunately, Dowd gives us no reasons for believing that this *terminological* change would actually bring about *behavioral* change. He asserts that in making this change "we will be moved to do all that we can to prevent further losses of biodiversity [and?!] and to work for a just and thriving future for all." But:

- How to get people to make this terminological change?

- Were such a change accomplished, would it result in people "seeing the world as it truly is" (i.e., would it result in *perceptual* change)? Would they, that is, begin to think of "Reality as divine"?

- Were it to result in *perceptual* change, would that change then result in what *truly* matters—*behavioral* change?

Dowd gives us no satisfactory answers to these questions.

Perhaps even more importantly, how is the average individual to relate to a statement such as this (p. 119)?: "God is that which sources and infuses everything, yet is also co-emergent with and indistinguishable from anything." Is this anything but gibberish?! (A rhetorical question, of course). *I* have difficulty deriving any sort of meaning from this statement, and suspect that that's true for most other individuals as well.

It seems to me that if one is going to introduce a new concept of God, one that moves away from the concept of God as a person-like Being (to whom/which, therefore, prayers can be meaningfully directed—because this Being is a Decider and Actor), taking a "giant step" here—i.e., moving to a concept that is far removed from the *existing* concept of God—is a serious mistake. For how does anyone relate to Ultimate Reality or Universe as the *new* God?

One *can't*, I would assert! If a new God concept is to be introduced, it must, I would contend, need to have (a) *some* connection with the old concept and (b) be meaningful/relevant. In my "[Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#)" I present a concept of God that, I believe, meets both of these criteria. In referring, in that paper, to God as "that which" . . . (a) at times reveals truths to us humans (especially in a "community" setting) and (b) at times "possesses" us (again, especially in a "community" setting), I present a concept of "God" that is:

- *Familiar*, because of being the sort of God encountered, at times, in the Bible.

- *Meaningful* for that reason, and also because one may have an *experience* (a "natural high"), perhaps especially in a community setting, that one can easily attribute to God's presence (in the form of the Holy Spirit, a *concept* present in the Bible).

- *Relevant*, in that truths may be "revealed" (especially in a community setting) that may, on the one hand, increase one's *understanding*, while also proving to be *useful* for potential actions—engaged in as an individual, or as a group member—with these "revelations" again being readily attributed to "God" in being perceived as *wonderful*, "out of this world." By the same token, I find it virtually impossible to believe that anyone—including Dowd himself!—can come to sincerely think of "*Reality* as divine."

The concept of "God" that I am putting forward here, then, is one in which "God" is the (undefined) *cause* of certain *effects*: "God" is "*that which*"—that (mysterious Something) which reveals truths to people and/or "possesses" them (i.e., gives them a natural "high"), especially in a group setting.

It's true that the God introduced in my "Worship" paper is very much *human-oriented* (unlike Dowd's Ultimate Reality). But rather than perceiving that as a *problem*, I perceive it as a "*plus*." For I believe that the New Word Fellowship (NeWF) participation advocated in "Worship" can result in participants perceiving *miracles* as commonplace.[4] And insofar as *that* occurs, it will have positive implications for participants' behavior—not only relative to other humans, but *all* of "creation."

So much, then, for the "God" in Dowd's title; what about "evolution"? The first known use of this word [occurred](#) in 1622. The word "evolution originated from Latin word *evolutio*, which means unrolling, something like unrolling of the scroll, and the word existed a couple of

centuries before [Charles] Darwin wrote *Origin of Species*. He in fact did not even use the word evolution in his book until the last line . . . ."

The word "evolution" has, however, come to be associated specifically with *biological* evolution, both *monotypic* (change of a given species into a new species) and *polytypic* (the development of *several* species from a single one)—it being evident that Dowd is not aware of this distinction. *Because* of the fact that "evolution" has come to be associated with *biological* changes, a certain set of *causal factors* have become associated with "evolution"—such as (a) environmental change, (b) predation, (c) sexual selection, and even (!) (d) Darwinian "natural" selection (i.e., that selection resulting from intraspecific competition induced by "excess" births)—a fact that Dowd doesn't seem to understand, given his statement (p. 32) that "What Darwin called 'natural selection' is nothing more than the sum of Nature's sorting processes." (For a detailed discussion of Darwin's concept—*not* theory—of "natural selection," see my *Ringing the Bell for Darwin*.)

For Dowd, however, "evolution" is not merely a biological matter but is *cosmic history*—as the three chapters constituting Part I ("The Holy Trajectory of Evolution") make clear. What that implies for us humans is that we are a part of an extremely long process of "evolution;" we are, therefore, (p. 89) "made of stardust!"

For Dowd (p. 147), "An evolutionary understanding . . . [of our place in the universe] provides the perspective needed to develop practices for actually achieving peace and lasting victory over that which may have caused us to stumble in the past. Hallelujah!" (To which *I* respond: "Rubbish!") In making this statement, Dowd seems to be simply repeating Thomas Berry, who is quoted on p. 317: "For peoples generally, their story of the universe and the human role within the universe is their primary source of intelligibility and value."

I happen to disagree with this assertion by Berry—and the fact that *none* of the essays or eBooks that I have written to this point has discussed cosmological matters demonstrates how unimportant such matters are to *me*. (Which, of course, is not to say that those matters *lack* in importance, I will readily admit.) I would add that in my 73 years of life I have never encountered an individual with such interests—which (other than indicating that I live in a small world!) leads me to believe that although cosmological matters may be of interest to a small group of intellectuals, most of us—although perhaps "believing in" the Big Bang (if aware of it!), etc.—spend virtually no time actually *thinking* about it. Given this, cosmological ideas would appear—to me, at least—to be a poor basis for creating a new theology!

Although I have nothing negative to say about the cosmological ideas presented by Dowd (I 'm simply not interested in them!), I am disappointed that Dowd demonstrates so little knowledge of the Discrepancy (which I discuss in Chapters 2 – 4 of my *What Are Churches* For*?*) Dowd *alludes* to the concept in his brief discussion (p. 155) of "Mismatch Theory": "Cultural evolution has occurred at such a fast pace and has so impacted natural environments that the

brain structures and behavioral proclivities we humans have inherited are adapted to conditions that are as out of sync with those of today as riding horseback on a freeway or throwing a spear at a freight train." But Dowd's discussion of this "theory" is (a) trivial and superficial beyond belief, and (b) such as to prevent him from realizing that "inherited proclivities" are but one factor explaining human behavior over the past, say, 10,000 years (the nature of one's upbringing, the "context" within which one leads one's life, prevailing ideology, and the Fall (another name for the Discrepancy) being among other factors). [5]

Dowd seems to argue had holding a certain set of *beliefs* is not important (e.g., on pp. 336 - 37 he states that one need not "read the Bible, in order to walk what is, . . . a REALized, redemptive life of fulfillment and service in this world, here and now, while simultaneously blessing future generations"). But one *is*, evidently, expected to read *cosmological* works so that the knowledge one gains thereby will be absorbed thoroughly, and the *beliefs* that one acquires about cosmological matters will somehow guide one's life: Presumably the reason that Dowd places so much emphasis on cosmological ideas is that he's convinced that *awareness* of those ideas is essential if one is to live a proper life—a position with which I disagree utterly, and which Dowd does not argue in a convincing manner.

Dowd's Chapter 11 ("Evolutionary Integrity Practices") provides (pp. 16 – 17) a discussion of "exercises that can bless your life and the lives of everyone with whom you are in relationship— no matter what your religion." Some, if not most, of these exercises seem to be of value, I will admit. My problems with them, however, are that (a) they are only "good exercises" if individuals actually engage in them (!)—and it seems to me that it would be difficult to get individuals to do so; (b) I see *more* value in structured discussions involving about 12 individuals, which subject I discuss in my "Worship" paper, cited earlier. (A rather extended discussion of anticipated *consequences* of participation is presented near the end of that paper.)

I must admit that one section that I *did* find of considerable interest in Dowd's book was his discussion of "Major Challenges in the Next 250 Years" (pp. 300 – 02) and "Wild Cards" in (pp. 302 – 07) in Chapter 17 ("Beyond Sustainability: An Inspiring Vision"). In the first section he discusses:

- Climate change.

- The continuing loss of biodiversity.

- The impacts of a growing world population.

- The gap between rich/poor, haves/have nots.

- Peak oil.

- Geopolitical conflicts.

- The development of biocomputers.

- Aligning self-interest with the well-being of the whole.

And in his "Wild Cards" section he lists:

- The eruption of supervolcanoes (such as Yellowstone—which erupts roughly every 600,000 years—with the last major eruption being 640,000 years ago!).

- Asteroid impacts or extreme solar activity.

- Mega tsunamis (such as might be created by the eruption of a volcano named Cumbre Vieja in the Canary Islands).

- Pole shift or magnetic field reversal.

- Gulf stream shutting down.

- Proof of extraterrestrial life or intelligence.

- An epidemic of flu, smallpox, drug-resistant tuberculosis, emerging diseases.

Some of these "wild cards" could be truly devastating; the problem, however, is that with most of them, they are *beyond our control*—which is also true for the "challenge" of "climate change," despite that this is a problem of our own making: It seems rather certain that it is now too late to halt further "climate change."

Dowd, however, seems neither to be aware of this latter fact, nor aware of the threat, to our species' *continued existence*, posed by this threat. Thus, it is not surprising that he does not (as *I* have been doing) advocate taking the adaptation option—e.g., in the form of a communitarian movement. For this reason—along with the facts that I do not share Dowd's interest in cosmological matters, nor do I find his religious views [6] of interest—I am glad that I paid only $4.00 for his book: I can now rip my copy of the book apart (which I have now done), and throw it into the recycle bin without feeling that I have been cheated overly much!

Dowd seemingly perceives his book as putting an end to the conflict that has existed, over the years, between science and religion, but what Dowd doesn't seem to understand is that the basis of the conflict has been factual claims—of a cosmological nature, regarding particular humans (who may or may not have ever existed—e.g., Noah), regarding human events (such as turning

water into wine), etc.—by religions and religious leaders that have been questionable, even blatantly false. That is, religions have made *scientific* claims, but have not provided satisfactory—if any!—evidence in support of their claims. *That*, "Rev." Dowd, is reason for the conflict that has existed, in the past, between science and religion.

Were the ideas of my *A Religion for Today* to be adopted, there would *be* no conflict between science and religion, because I perceive religion in terms of (a) structured meetings such that participation in them results in (b) perceptual changes, with the (c) perceptual and motivational changes resulting from participation resulting, in turn, in (d) behavioral actions of a positive nature relative to other humans and other lifeforms, and (e) actions directed toward "saving" our, and other, species, from catastrophes likely to occur "down the road."

I conceive the religious person as not only trying to live by the "Do no harm" dictum, but also the principle, "Do what you can to contribute to the well-being of others—of the same and other species—both in the here-and-now and the future." Acting on these principles requires having scientific knowledge about certain phenomena (e.g., human behavior, ecological matters, global warming, etc.), but can also be aided by recognizing the essentially mysterious nature of this universe within which we live. For such a recognition will make one cautious in one's actions, and thereby perhaps enable one to avoid engaging in activities that result in more harm than good. As to Dowd's concept of "being religious": I'm not convinced that it's *possible* for most people, so that for that reason alone I have to question it.

Endnotes

1. On the basis of this background one would think that he would know the Bible "frontwards and backwards." However, on p. 362 he declares that stories of the virgin birth of Jesus were reported in the gospels of Luke and John—when, in actuality, it was Matthew and Luke that contained such stories (neither Mark nor John containing a birth story).

2. For those interested, here is some additional information about Dowd:

   Dowd compares his own spiritual journey to St. Paul's experience on the road to Damascus: falling blind, then seeing a new vision. For years, in his pre-UU [Unitarian Universalist] days as a conservative Christian pastor, he had proclaimed evolution was "of the devil" and the root of most social problems. He would argue with anybody who'd listen, passing out tracts, boycotting classes, and demonstrating at events where evolution was discussed. Then in 1988, as pastor of a church in western Massachusetts, he took a class on "The New Catholic Mysticism" with poet Albert LaChance, who had studied with [Thomas] Berry and [Brian] Swimme.

   Dowd has written about hearing the Great Story for the first time: "I began to tremble. Goosebumps broke out all over my arms and legs. Then I heard that unmistakably familiar voice of Great Heart, my Lord, say to me, Michael, your calling and destiny is to evangelize the world with this good news. The science-based story of an emerging universe and the Bible are not in conflict. They are mutually enriching. Show others how this is so, and live it." For more than a

decade Dowd awaited further instruction, continuing as a pastor until leaving fellowship with the United Church of Christ in 1995. In his free time he studied the Great Story, meeting with Berry and others in the movement.

Then in 2000 he got a second message. A friend had invited him to a Pentecostal charismatic service near his childhood home in Poughkeepsie, New York. During the service, he recalls, she said she had "a word from the Lord for me: 'My son, I have called thee home to reveal thy true mission. Step out boldly with thy beloved and fear not. For I will bless thy steps and thy ministry more abundantly than thou canst imagine.'" While the King James English amused Dowd, he was intrigued by the phrase "with thy beloved." He thought to himself, "You'd better get moving, dude. You don't even have a girlfriend!"

Several months later at a talk given by Swimme in New York City, Dowd met Connie Barlow, and the pair discovered their shared passion for spreading the Great Story. In seven months they were married.

3. It appears that the source of Dowd's concept of "day language" and "night language" (discussed on pp. 113 – 17) was a story told to Dowd by a woman after a church program: She recounted that her daughter referred to nonfiction books as "daytime" books, (fictional) story books as "nighttime" books.

4. Late in the book (p. 367) Dowd quotes Peter Mayer's *Holy Now*:

> When I was in Sunday school
> We learned about the times
> Moses split the sea in two
> Jesus made the water wine
> And I remember feeling sad
> That miracles don't happen still
> Now I can't keep track
> Because everything's a miracle
> Everything, everything's a miracle.

Note that this poem makes no reference to *God*, just the fact that the author has learned, as he has grown older, to *perceive* the things around him as miracles—*without asking, or even speculating about, their origin.* What this suggests is that the development of certain *perceptions* does not necessarily lead to *intellectualizing* (e.g., asking about origin). Interestingly, Dowd uses this quotation by Albert Einstein as (p. 357) the epigraph for his Appendix B ("Realizing the Miraculous"): "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."

5. Dowd's preference is to explain human behavior primarily on the basis of *brain* developments over time. In his Chapter 10 ("Realizing 'Personal Salvation'") he discusses our "lizard legacy," "li'l mammal" brain, and "Higher Porpoise."

6. On p. 295 Dowd refers to "the boyishly attractive Pastor Joel Osteen [!], who deftly uses scriptural passages to ground his self-empowerment message in biblical fare," and on p. 296 asserts that the megachurches "provide what people (especially young people) are seeking." What this latter statement suggests is that a religious organization should perceive itself as serving a certain "market" to be "successful." At times, I should add, and perhaps especially in his videos, Dowd comes across as being a "huckster" (!)—and thereby a true American!

   Regarding megachurches, the following statement is of interest: "A lead pastor in a mega church can earn an average salary of $147,000 according to an article on the report by the website *Christian Post*." This suggests that "clergy" such as Joel Osteen, with a television audience, "earn" a great deal more—which suggests, in turn, that their motives are less than pure!

Paradoxical Behavior?

Alton C. Thompson

Tim Radford, writing for Climate News Network, recently stated:

> The Greenland Ice Sheet is a highly sensitive indicator of regional and global change, and [has], says Prof Hanna, been undergoing rapid warming, and losing ice, for at least the last five years and probably the last 20.

The "Prof Hanna" referred to here is Prof. Edward Hanna of Sheffield University. Hanna added (per Radford): "The next five to 10 years will reveal whether or not 2012 was a rare event resulting from natural variability of the NAO or part of an emerging pattern of new extreme high melt years."

I would add that Hanna et al. state, at the end of a recent article:

> Part 2 of this study will systematically analyse the atmospheric circulation/jet stream dynamics affecting Greenland climate systematically for all seasons, which can help explain some of the SAT anomalies highlighted above. It will be especially valuable to analyse the atmospheric circulation regimes and anomalies, e.g. using geopotential height data from Twentieth Century Reanalysis (Compo et al 2011), to gain a better insight into and understanding of the previous, early Twentieth Century Greenland warming, which peaked around 1940, and so help set the more recent (last 20 years') warming in a dynamical context of previous (pre-anthropogenic) more 'natural' circulation patterns. The better understanding thus acquired should ultimately help refine future predictions of Greenland regional climate (and ice-sheet mass balance) change.

Not to be disrespectful, but these statements by Hanna (and others, in the second case) remind me of a question asked over 50 years ago by Everett Knight (*The Objective Society*, 1960, p. 32) regarding intellectuals:

> how are they to justify their position in our society[,] which is that of a man seated on the rear of a lorry examining the road behind while an incompetent driver moves on at a reckless speed in what is perhaps the wrong direction?

Are not the scientists—*most* of them, at any rate—of today comparable to the intellectuals referred to several decades back by Knight? The complaint that Knight had was that intellectuals were focused on the past, and as a consequence were not being very helpful in helping solve either current problems, or problems looming on the horizon. Whereas it's certainly true that scholars such as Hanna are providing us with some valuable information about what's occurring,

and what's likely to occur, what he doesn't seem to "get" is that information of the sort that he has been providing is valuable, not *for its own sake*, but because it has *behavioral implications*.

Members of past societies which have collapsed—discussed, e.g., in Jared Diamond's recent *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (2011)—may not have realized the danger that their societies were in until it was too late. Today, however, the scientific advances over the years allow us not only to *understand* the workings of Earth System reasonably well, but also enable us to make reasoned *projections* into the future.

For example, we have been able to determine that the global mean has increased by about 0.8˚ C. since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (c 1750 CE), and from our knowledge of Physics principles have been able to project that the greenhouse gases *already present in the atmosphere* are sufficient to result in a further increase of at least 1˚ C., and perhaps as much as 1.6˚ C.

The significance of these "findings" is that:

- Although no one knows with certainty what the "tipping point" is, relative to when "runaway" will begin to occur;

- There are good scientific reasons for believing that "runaway" *is* a possibility; and

- The consensus, with climate scientists, is that the "tipping point" will occur with an increase of 2˚ C.—with some climate scientists arguing for a somewhat lower point.

- Given that humans are continuing to pour "greenhouse gases" into the atmosphere, and it's highly unlikely that drastic reductions in those emissions are in the offing in the near future, it's virtually certain that "runaway" is in our future—the only question being, *when* it will begin (with the possibility, of course, that we have *already* entered it!).

Given the above, I find it puzzling that scientists such as Hanna seem to lack concern for our entering a "runaway" phase of climate change—as indicated by his interest in what will be happening in Greenland over the next 5 to 10 years, combined with a seeming *lack* of interest in *his own* well-being in the near future.

Certainly Prof. Hanna is aware that when we enter a phase of "runaway," the erratic, and intensified, weather conditions that then become the "norm" will make living difficult. Initially, some people will be affected more than others (the "lowers" of the world, most likely); but a point will be reached when societal collapse becomes a domino-like phenomenon—as society after society collapses, and death rates soar. That is, a point will be reached when *everyone* is affected by global warming.

Why, then, is Prof. Hanna not beginning to *prepare* himself and his family for this eventuality, rather than seemingly believing that he can continue his research efforts indefinitely? Why can't

he realize that Sheffield University will be a victim of global warming along with all other universities?

A psychologist might argue that people become so attached to their way of life (especially if a comfortable one) that even in becoming aware of the possibility that forces currently operating are likely to *destroy* that way of life, their brains will suppress that possibility from consciousness, consigning it to a part of the brain unlikely to be accessed. Still, I find it difficult to understand why *those individuals who are the most knowledgeable about global warming, because they are actively researching it, seem to be so lacking in awareness of the* effects *that global warming is likely to have for* them *within a few years or decades*.

Granted that *knowing about* global warming involves a different sort of knowledge than does knowledge—or ideas—regarding *how one should respond* to the threat of global warming. But does a given academic discipline—whether it's climate science or some other discipline—so lock one into a certain mode of thinking that one is simply unable to escape that prison—*even if one's life depends on it?* Seemingly, that's the case!

"Shut up he explained" [1]

Alton C. Thompson

> Job losses will only get worse as the 21st century progresses. Global capital will continue to move jobs to places on the planet that have the lowest labor costs. Technology will continue to improve, eliminating countless jobs.
>
> There is no evidence to back up the claim that we can create jobs for everyone who wants one. To rely on jobs and economic growth does not work. We have to get rid of the myth that "welfare-to-work" will solve the problems of unemployment, poverty, and homelessness.
>
> "Work" and jobs are not the answer to ending poverty. This has been the hardest concept for us to understand. It's the hardest concept to sell to citizens and policy makers. To end poverty and to achieve true economic freedom, we need to break the link between work and income.
>
> Job creation is a completely wrong approach because the world doesn't need everyone to have a job in order to produce what is needed for us to live a decent, comfortable life.

So states Allan Sheahen in a recent article, in which he also asserts that. "there will never again be enough jobs for everyone who wants one—no matter who is in the White House or in Congress."

What I would say to Mr. Sheahen, first, regarding his assertions is that *never is a very long time*! Perhaps when *Sheahen* peers into the future, he sees tomorrow as being basically a repeat of today, the day after tomorrow as being basically a repeat of tomorrow, etc. In making those (tacit) assumptions, however, Sheehen evinces a lack of awareness of *global warming*—and the likelihood that "runaway" will occur within a few decades. Why is *that* likelihood significant? Runaway climate change means not only that (a) the global mean temperature will begin to increase much more rapidly than it has so far, but there will be (b) increased storminess, (c) an increase in the number of severe storms, and (d) increasingly erratic weather conditions.

These changes in atmospheric conditions will mean, in turn, increases in (a) the number and severity of floods, of (b) storm damage, of (c) destructive fires, and of (c) diseases, and (d) decreases in the food/water supply. These various changes together imply that (e) *violence* will increase as people become unable to satisfy their basic needs, and therefore become desperate; so that the death rate from violence will increase drastically, along with the death rate from disease and starvation. Not a pretty picture, true; but the physical laws that will be in operation—helped along by human activity—have no interest in preserving life, human or otherwise.

That fact suggests that we either ignore those laws, and succumb passively to their operation—awakening from our slumber only after it is too late; or, we recognize that (a) it is near the midnight hour, (b) therefore too late to halt further warming (with its corollaries), so that (c) our only choice now is to try to adapt to the changes, down the road (by but a short distance!) that will be inevitably occurring.

Fortunately, the need for an emphasis on adaptation is coming to be increasingly recognized, as is indicated by this statement:

> The Georgetown Climate Center's law and policy work is focused in the coastal and public health sectors and it strives to address the legal barriers involved with adaptation to sea-level rise, the increased frequency, scope, and severity of heat events and the spread of hazardous waste by increased flooding.

Unfortunately, adaptation efforts currently underway are primarily oriented to governmental units, and seem based on the assumption that adaptation can be accomplished without any significant loss of life. That is, they fail to recognize how serious the problem of global warming is—and will become—and therefore mislead governmental leaders and the public as to (a) the likelihood that global warming will cull most of the world's population and, therefore, (b) the sorts of actions that will be necessary to save at least some portion of that population—assuming, that is, that that's possible (which may, or may not, be the case!).

First, then, the future is likely to be very different from what Mr. Sheahen envisions. Second, it will be so different that adaptation efforts will need to be engaged in if one is to have any hope for survival. Third, although more and more people and governmental agencies are beginning to realize this fact, they fail to recognize how *devastating* global warming (and its corollaries) is likely to be, and are therefore are making recommendations that are too anemic given the severity of the problem.

What these deficiencies suggests, then, is that (a) individuals and private organizations need to come to realize that *they* must take the lead in this matter, and that (b) in doing so, the severity of the problem calls for two possible courses of action—homesteading and eco-community-creation—with the latter being the preferable option.

In either case, *work* would, of course, be involved, with homesteading involving the work necessary for sustenance being done by the homesteader and family members, and the eco-communitarian option involving the work being done by all those capable of doing so. Whereas homesteading allows little in the way of specialization, the eco-communitarian option does, with more specialization being enabled the larger the eco-community—and the more neighboring such communities.

Adam Smith distinguished between "productive" and "non-productive" labor, with the former involving creating things that are consumed in some sense, the latter involving "services"—with

soldiers, doctors, clergy, lawyers, and musicians being in that category. An eco-community would, of course, require that productive labor be done by those capable of doing it, and would also require some individuals providing services (such as medical services), but not others—soldiers, lawyers, clergy, etc. The small size of an eco-community would place limitations on what the community could support; but as there occurred a proliferation of eco-communities in a given area, more specialists could be supported—in this case by a number of *neighboring* communities rather than just a single one.

Although not strictly necessary, the performance of music should be encouraged—as the [Gaviotas](#) experience demonstrates, meaning that musicians should be supported, along with any other occupations with potential to add to the *quality of life* of community residents. And if some of the residents of a given community desire to gain a *variety* of skills, so that they can rotate between jobs, this should be encouraged—for working at what one likes to do, and gaining competence in performing various tasks, should be recognized as sources of self-esteem and pleasure.

For many in contemporary society, work—if, that is, they are employed!—is often boring, irksome—the reason for this being that some in our midst are "driven" by a need to become rich and famous, and may initiate businesses simply to serve those ends. Given that those businesses require employees (even if most of the actual work is done by machines and computers), the jobs created for those employees tend to created without consideration for whether they will provide fulfillment, enjoyment to those occupying the positions. That is, jobs are created to satisfy the desires of *employers*, without consideration of the needs—physical and psychological—of *employees*.

In an eco-community, in contrast, work will be created on the basis of what's *needed* for the sustenance and comfort of the community's residents, and what's *desired* by them; and the particular *activities* constituting a given job will be designed so as to meet the limitations, needs, and desires of those occupying the position.

The atmospheric conditions associated with global warming will make life stressful for those trying to adapt by living in eco-communities—and will, perhaps, even be such as to cause the demise of all residents of a given eco-community. But for those able to survive, the challenges presented by global warming may make them appreciate life *per se*—so that their behavior relative to others (whether in the same community or living elsewhere) and the surround will benefit.

[You will have noticed by now that I have made no reference to my title—for the simple reason that the title has no relevance for this essay! I chose the title for its humor.]

Endnote

1. A famous "explanation" (!) offered in Ring Lardner, Jr.'s [1885 – 1933] *The Young Immigrunts* (1920), p. 78. Note that the link provided here is to the *book*, not a review of it.

Our Press . . . And More

Alton C. Thompson

The recent revelations of Edward Snowden, via Glenn Greenwald, that some of one's fundamental rights are being violated make one angry, with this anger being compounded by the fact that members of the "fourth estate," who *should* be displaying an adversarial relationship with federal government officials, are instead doing the *opposite*. Evidently, journalists are too interested in retaining their jobs to be bothered with "truth-telling." Maintaining a good relationship with news sources is evidently more important to them than performing a public service. (The cartoon to the left is entitled "The Naked Dragnet Emperor," an OtherWords cartoon by Khalil Bendib. Used with permission.)

Granted that the founders of our current governmental system (which succeeded the Articles of Confederation) did not intend to establish a democracy: The Executive and Judicial branches were established as checks on the Legislative branch; the Senate (within the Legislative branch) was established as a check on the House of Representatives; and the qualifications for voting excluded many citizens. Still, a Bill of Rights went into effect shortly after (in 1791) the Constitution did (in 1789), and those rights were expanded, over time, with the passage of amendments to the Bill. In addition, there has long been the expectation that the press would function as an additional safeguard to our rights. It is no wonder, then, that many of us today feel betrayed both by our national government and by the press.

Are our expectations regarding the press, specifically, *justified*? Consider the following statement:

> [Edward L.] Bernays [1891 – 1995] refined and popularized the use of the press release, following its invention by PR man Ivy Lee, who had issued a press release after the 1906 Atlantic City train wreck. One of the most famous campaigns of Bernays was the women's cigarette smoking campaign in 1920s. Bernays helped the smoking industry overcome one of the biggest social taboos of the time: women smoking in public. Women were only allowed to smoke in designated areas, or not at all. If caught violating this rule, women would have been arrested.[11]

Bernays staged the 1929 Easter parade in New York City, showing models holding lit Lucky Strike cigarettes, or "Torches of Freedom". After the historical public event, women started lighting up more than ever before. It was through Bernays that women's smoking habits started to become socially acceptable. Bernays created this event as news, which, of course, it wasn't. Bernays convinced industries that the news, not advertising, was the best medium to carry their message to an unsuspecting public.

Bernays—whose uncle was Sigmund Freud—used Freud's psychoanalytic ideas in conjunction with "the ideas of Gustave Le Bon and Wilfred Trotter on crowd psychology" to pioneer the field of "public relations"—a euphemism for "thought control." Interestingly, Bernays admitted as much, for in his book *Propaganda* (1928) he said:

> "The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of."[6]

> Bernays expands this argument to the economic realm, appreciating the positive impact of propaganda in the service of capitalism.[7]

What one suspects, on the basis of the above statements, is that the "mind control" to which we have been subjected over the past few decades has influenced the thinking of *most* of us—including journalists. Thus, journalists' serving as "lapdogs" for governmental officials is not just a matter of wanting to retain news sources, but is a result of a far more sinister force operating in our society—*conscious efforts at thought control*. Efforts directed by those "know" that democracy is a bad idea—who believe as the cartoon above states, "it is necessary to destroy our freedom in order to save it" (!).

It is easy to understand the thesis that the reason why the mass media do such a poor job of informing the public is that the advertisers who are their major source of income don't want a well-informed public, and make that fact known to those who control the mass media. They may convey this intention in fairly subtle ways, but the fact of the matter is that they *do* it.

What's much less obvious is the *thought control efforts* directed at us virtually constantly—by advertisers, of course, but also by the purveyors of "news." And although these efforts are largely invisible, they help explain why suggestions for fixing our societal problems tend to be so "lame":

- Trying to convince our lawmakers to make changes in our laws—by calling their offices, sending emails to their offices, signing petitions, participating in protest marches, etc.

- Engaging in efforts to "throw out the rascals."

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The label "lame" is even appropriate for this suggestion by libertarian Joel S. Hirschhorn (offered after a justly-deserved diatribe against Pres. O'Bomber):

> American democracy has so deteriorated that I can see little hope of its resurrection absent some form of revolution consistent with out [i.e., "our"?] Constitution, namely using what our Founders gave us: an Article V convention of state delegates with the legal authority to propose true reform constitutional amendments that still would have to be ratified by three-quarters of the states. Clearly, there is no reason to have any faith that Congress would ever propose amendments to fix our corrupt, inefficient and dysfunctional federal system that Senators and Representative continue to deface and defraud. For example, taking all private money out of politics. Nor is there any basis for believing that the Supreme Court will come to the rescue.

For:

- The probability of a new Constitutional convention occurring approaches zero.

- Even if one *were* to occur, the thought control occurring in our society would ensure little or no improvement over the existing Constitution; indeed, that thought control might very well result in a new Constitution *even more* to the liking of the society's elite than the current one!

Although Hirschhorn's "solution" to our problems is the most "radical" of the three mentioned above, all three have in common the tacit assumption that the existing social order must be taken as a "given." The *problem* with that assumption, of course, is not only that the Existing Order *per se* is the major *cause* of our problems, but that the Existing Order *cannot continue much longer*: Global warming will likely wipe out most of the world's population within a few decades, in the process causing virtually all societies to collapse. Given the evil that the Executive branch of our government has committed, and is likely to continue to commit, it seems likely that societal collapse is the only "solution" to this problem that will "work." For that reason alone one might very well welcome the collapse of our society.

Recognizing this very real possibility of societal collapse, the only sensible course today is to start creating a New Society, following the communitarian option that I have discussed in numerous previous essays. If that option is followed "properly," the problem of thought control should not arise. This may *sound* like a "radical"—even "utopian"—solution, but our situation today is such that it is the only *practical* solution there is!

O'Bomber, Our Savior

Alton C. Thompson

Pres. Barack O'Bomber, in his recent climate speech, said:

> the question is not whether we need to act. The overwhelming judgment of science—of chemistry and physics and millions of measurements—has put all that to rest. Ninety-seven percent of scientists, including, by the way, some who originally disputed the data, have now put that to rest. They've acknowledged the planet is warming and human activity is contributing to it.

> So the question now is whether we will have the courage to act before it's too late. And how we answer will have a profound impact on the world that we leave behind not just to you, but to your children and to your grandchildren.

> As a President, as a father, and as an American, I'm here to say we need to act.

Given, however, the hypocrisy that has been displayed by the Executive branch of our government over the past few decades—and actually *intensified* (including this) during the O'Bomber regime—there is no reason to believe him.

Chris Williams has reacted to O'Bomber's speech by saying:

> So is Obama, in the words of World Resource Institute President Andrew Steer, really "resetting the climate agenda" and can we honestly say that "it's a wonderful thing to see that he is really reclaiming this issue"?

> While many other environmentalists, including Bill McKibben of 350.org, are fervently hoping that this is true, history and facts demonstrate otherwise. Obama's dismal domestic and international track record on environmental issues—it was, after all, he who was the lead protagonist in wrecking the international climate talks in Copenhagen in 2009—and his commitment to U.S. imperial power as a representative of American corporate interests surely point toward the need for a greater and more thoroughgoing critique than a character assessment of the man himself allows for.

My own reaction to the speech is twofold:

- There is no reason to believe that O'Bomber—despite the fact that he is a father!—is sincere about instituting policies aimed at reducing the threat of global warming. This assessment is based on his past actions, in conjunction with what he is now proposing.

- Even if O'Bomber *does* "follow through" with his proposals, they will not prevent catastrophe—because they fail to take "climate commitment" into account.

"Climate commitment" refers to the increase in the global mean temperature to which the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere *at present*—ignoring any future additions—"commit" us. No precise number can be given for the magnitude of this commitment (climate scientists say that it is between 1˚ C. and 1.6˚ C.), of course. But regardless of what it is, two facts are clear:

- It is a somewhat meaningless number because of the prospect that humans will *continue* to pour greenhouse gases into the atmosphere for decades to come, thereby moving the time when "runaway" will begin ever closer.

- Given that the consensus with climate scientists is that a 2˚ C. increase is the maximum "safe" amount of increase (before "runaway" change begins), and that the global mean has *already* increased by about 0.8˚ C., it is *inevitable* that runaway will begin at some point in the future. *When* that will be is a matter of speculation, but some experts believe that runaway could begin within 30 years.

A few climate scientists believe that runaway is likely even before a 2˚ C. increase in the global mean is "achieved," and if *those* scientists are right, runaway could begin even sooner.

It can be assumed that whatever "knowledge" O'Bomber has gained about global warming, during his presidency, has come via communications from his advisors rather than from his reading of the relevant literature, the result being that it is clear that he is unaware of the matter of climate commitment. Which raises the question, however: If O'Bomber *were* aware of the "climate commitment" concept, would he adopt different policies relative to climate change?

One would like to *think* that he would, given that he has two young daughters, and as a father, he should be concerned about the world that they will be living in thirty or forty years "down the road." But the evil that his administration has been perpetrating abroad—and even locally (in terms of the invasion of privacy)—seems to indicate a sick mind, one simply incapable of peering realistically into the future.

Even if O'Bomber *were* to approach the problem of global warming with some degree of rationality, his proposals would be flawed because of his obvious inability to escape the "intellectual box" of conventional thinking. *Such* thinking takes as a basic, if tacit, premise that the Existing Order is a "given." What *that* fact implies is that any proposals that he offers will, of necessity, involve mere "tinkering" with the System.

Some climate scientists (e.g., Britain's Prof. Kevin Anderson) are courageous enough to state, publicly, that global warming is likely to wipe out most of the world's population *regardless of what we do*, from either a mitigation or an adaptation standpoint. What *that* implies is that societies—including ours—will be "falling like dominoes" within a few decades.

And what *that* (very strong) possibility suggests, in turn, is that our only hope—insofar as we *have* any hope!—lies in creating eco-communities designed to be (initially, at any rate) as self-sufficient as possible.

What I am suggesting, in effect, as the answer to global warming (again, insofar as there *is* one) is *societal system change*—the replacement of the Existing Order with a New Society. That is the sort of change that will not occur as a result of sponsorship by the federal government, of course—and for at least two reasons:

- The fact that the leadership of the federal government consists of individuals *incapable* of ever considering such a program, because it would require thinking outside the intellectual "box" within which their minds are trapped.

- The fact that the corporate—and military—elites that are in control of our society, and its governments (the federal one in particular), are interested only in their short-term interests, and would therefore prevent any move for societal system change initiated by our leaders from ever "getting off the ground."

Individuals, then, acting either as individuals or as members of groups, will need to take the lead in such an endeavor *if it is to be realized*. To look to O'Bomber for leadership in this matter—i.e., to look to O'Bomber for "salvation"—would be the height of folly.

Some Simple Statements About Complex Societies
Alton C. Thompson

A member of a large, complex society becomes aware of some of the activities occurring within the society within which s/he lives, but remains ignorant of most of those activities:

- The activities themselves—within just a 24-hour period—are so voluminous that even if one *would* become aware of all of them (not possible, of course!), one would be able to *remember* but a few—and one's memories would fade over time.

- One comes in *direct* contact with just a few of the activities occurring at any given moment, and of those, only a few enter one's conscious mind—with whatever memories thereby gained also fading with time.

- The knowledge that one gains regarding activities in one's society from *secondary* sources—reading newspaper/magazine articles or books, visiting internet sites, watching TV, conversing with others, etc.—is often incomplete, distorted, and misleading, and often *intended* to have those characteristics.

People vary in their "drive" to acquire knowledge about the activities that are occurring, or have occurred, in their society, but most people are able to live their lives reasonably well, *ceteris paribus*, with the information that they *do* acquire. One can assume that individuals tend to seek out information about that which they regard as *important* (or at least interesting), but activities of importance for them may be occurring of which they are totally unaware.

For example, recently we have been learning about the (a) evil things our federal government (the Executive branch in particular)[28] has been doing during the past few decades, the fact that (b) the government has been lying to us about what they have been doing, and that (c) its evil doing has not been confined to those living in other countries, but to us as USans as well (in the case of the invasion of our privacy, for example). Whereas points (b) and (c) may "merely" hurt our sense of what is "right and decent" (besides being of doubtful legality), the first point—i.e., the massive killing of civilians by our government over the years—not only offends our sense of what is morally right (and what is legal), but is a sort of activity that can potentially influence us in the form of "blowback."

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[28] Paul Craig Roberts—who worked for the Ronald Reagan administration—is more charitable toward our "leaders": "God save us from the utter fools who comprise our government."

That is, those who suffer from blowback actions, committed in response to actions by our government, likely did not bear any responsibility for their government's actions (beyond the matter of voting for some of the leaders). *That* fact, however, is not likely to be on the minds of those involved in "blowback": Their interest is in avenging the evil directed at their family members, friends, etc., and the "targets" they choose are "handy" targets, not necessarily *guilty* ones. (911 is often cited as an example of blowback, but there is also the possibility that it was a "false flag" operation planned by Israel's Mossad.)

Not to diminish the importance of our government's massive killing of innocents during the past few decades, but an even more important problem facing us today *as humans*—not just as USans—is global warming. The *way we live our lives*—we Westerners in particular—involves pollution—including the emissions of the *greenhouse gases* that are *directly* responsible to global warming. Granted that most of us were born into the society within which we currently reside, so that we were not responsible for the characteristics of that society; nor do most of us play much of a role in shaping the society within which we live.

Despite those facts, we all "contribute" to global warming—to varying degrees, of course—but few of us are fully aware of *how* we contribute. We *may* be aware of the fact that the heating and cooling of our homes involves pollution, directly or indirectly (the latter by using electricity, which may be generated by the burning of coal), and that the driving of our automobiles involves pollution. However, we tend to be less aware of how else we contribute to pollution and environmental degradation. For example, most of us purchase the food that we consume (rather than raising it ourselves), so that:

- Those directly involved in food production/harvesting—by growing crops, raising animals, harvesting shrimp from the sea, etc.—contribute to soil loss, the lowering of the water table, pollution of water in aquifers/rivers/lakes/the ocean, etc. The fact that we purchase food makes us partially responsible for those environmental problems

- The "primary" activities associated with food production/harvesting are often heavily mechanized. The manufacturing of the machines involved itself involves pollution, as does the transport of "raw" materials to the production site, the transportation of finished products to warehouses/stores (with the manufacture, and operation, of the vehicles used for transportation *also* involving pollution, of course!), the "journey to work" of employees, etc. Again, the fact that we purchase food makes us somewhat responsible for the pollution produced in this case.

- The "raw" materials referred to in the above paragraph are typically minerals, as are the fuels used for production/transportation, with the former occurring in solid form, the latter in liquid form. In both cases, however, they are non-renewable "resources" (to consider them from a utilitarian perspective!), with the deposits involved varying in

"richness." The tendency is to begin by extracting the "richest" known deposits, then the less rich, until the cost of extraction becomes so great that there is an insufficient market to justify continued extraction. On the one hand, the fact that resources get "used up" is a problem; but on the other hand, although the extraction of resources *need* not have a significant impact on the environment, usually it does, for a variety of reasons. Thus, not only do extractive activities often involve the transformation of an esthetically pleasing landscape into an ugly one, but involve pollution of land and water—oil spills being a notorious example. Ditto, for our partial responsibility for this pollution and environmental degradation.

Although each of us bears some responsibility for this pollution—some more than others, of course—most of us are so embedded in our particular way of life that we are, in effect, *inmates* of our society. This is an apt term because not only do most of us never think about "escaping" our society; even if one *does*, one will tend not to:

- We resist changing our way of life because doing so would be psychologically stressful for most of us.

- Even if one would like to change one's way of life (for either "push" or "pull" reasons):

    - One may not know how to "escape."

    - Even if one has an "escape plan," one may lack the resources to act on that plan—or may be held back by family ties, etc.

Where the above discussion is leading is to why our society is likely to collapse within a few decades (despite the cautious optimism expressed by Jared Diamond in his book on the collapse of societies):

- People not being aware of their "environmental impact"—direct and indirect—and therefore doing nothing to decrease it.

- People being *somewhat* aware of their environmental impact, but being unable to lessen that impact much.

- People aware of the importance of reducing their impact drastically, but:

    - Not being aware that this would be best done by taking the self-sufficient eco-community option.

    - Aware that this is the case, but not being able to *act* on it.

Can this situation be changed, so that at least a few more people will be "saved" from the ravages that global warming is likely to be inflicting on us within a few decades? If so, I don't see how! Sorry, Prof. Diamond!

Too Much of a Good Thing is Wonderful?

Alton C. Thompson

My title here is a quote from Mae West (with a question mark added at the end), but is also the title of a movie about pianist Liberace (born in West Allis, Wisconsin, a suburb of Milwaukee). In addition, I believe that Dolly Parton said this at some time—and she should know!

However, in asking my title's question, I am not referring to movie starlets, pianists, etc., but, rather am referring to Jared Diamond's *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (2005). If you click on this link, the book will pop onto your computer screen, and you will see that the last page of the index is p. 575 (although page numbers are absent from this electronic version of the book). That is, it is a *lengthy* book (perhaps *too* long?).

The length of the book may cause one to ask if such a length is really necessary. One is perhaps especially likely to ask such a question if one questions Diamond's views regarding *why* societies collapse—in which case one may even conclude that the book shouldn't have been written (!), for it misleads the reader.

My view of the book is that although it contains a great deal of important information, Diamond does not (a) deal adequately with the threat to us humans posed by global warming, nor (b) does he identify the key reason why societal problems have developed over the centuries (such as the threat posed by global warming currently).

This latter point is of great importance because although most of Diamond's book is devoted to a discussion of societal collapses in the *past*, his *motivation* for writing the book was not merely to present historical accounts. His hope, in writing the book, is that we will be able to *learn* from the past, and thereby avert societal collapse *today*.

What Diamond emphasizes about societal collapses in the past is that (p. 6) they "undermined themselves by damaging their environments . . . ." He then lists eight ways in which past societies damaged their environments:

- Deforestation and habitat destruction.

- Soil problems (erosion, salinization, and soil fertility losses).

- Water management problems.

- Overhunting.

- Overfishing.

- Effects of introduced species on native species.

- Human population growth.

- Increased per capita impact of people.

Diamond then goes on to state (p. 7) that "The environmental problems facing us today include the same eight that undermined past societies, plus four new ones:"

- Human-caused [i.e., anthropogenic] climate change.

- Build-up of toxic chemicals in the environment.

- Energy shortages.

- Full human utilization of the Earth's photosynthetic capacity.

He adds that "Most of these 12 threats, it is claimed, will become globally critical within the next few decades: either we solve the problems by then, or the problems will undermine not just Somalia but also First World societies [such as the United States]." However, he then discounts those "claims" by asserting that "Much more likely than a doomsday scenario involving human extinction or an apocalyptic collapse of industrial civilization would be 'just' a future of significantly lower living standards."

Although I disagree with this assessment (as my previous essays on this site demonstrate), to his credit Diamond insists that these various problems are (p. 496) "linked." One of my problems with Diamond's discussion, however, is that it tacitly assumes that the problems he identifies and discusses are *uncaused causes*. That is, his discussion is at a lower *level of abstraction* than is advisable. Some of Diamond's critics, however, have evinced even more myopia in their thinking than Diamond.

Scott E. Page, for example (Professor of Complex Systems, Political Science, and Economics, and Director of the Center for the Study of Complex Systems at the University of Michigan), in a lengthy review of the book, asserts (p. 1052) that:

> Most of us (economic historians notwithstanding) would not have bothered with such a fact filled undertaking. The reason being that economics can provide an austere mathematical explanation for collapses. [In his initial paragraph, p. 1049, Page stated: "*his logic and his prescriptions would benefit from greater familiarity with some basic principles of economics and a richer understanding of human nature.*] (Italics in original.)

(Given this statement, one wonders why Page wrote such a long review of the book—extending from p. 1049 to 1062! I should add that one expects a geographer such as Diamond to have a rather intellectually peripatetic perspective, but is surprised—even amazed—to find such a perspective with economists—and Page most decidedly does *not* amaze one!.)

I stated earlier that Diamond neither (a) gives an adequate discussion of, nor (b) identifies the key reason why, societal collapse may very well be in our future, so let me now say a few words about both of those matters.

Diamond discusses global warming on p. 493, with his last sentence concluding at the top of p. 494. He notes the that climate scientists believe that the global mean could increase by between 1° C. and 5° C. during the next century, and adds the significance such an increase is that "average global temperatures were 'only' 5 degrees cooler at the height of the last Ice Age." Although Diamond then notes that the "rise in sea levels as a result of snow and ice melting poses dangers of flooding and coastal erosion," his discussion of global warming evinces no knowledge of (a) the fact that global warming is a process that tends to "feed on itself" (in that, e.g., as permafrost thaws, it releases methane gas—which is about 20 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide—and that release in itself causes more global warming), (b) the fact that the consensus with climate scientists is that an increase of over 2° C. would result in "runaway" change, or (c) "climate commitment"—the possibility that the greenhouse gases *now in the atmosphere*—without any further additions—may be enough to bring about runaway.

My main problem with Diamond's discussion, however, is its *level of abstraction*—the fact that it tacitly assumes that the problems he has identified are "uncaused causes." A more sophisticated explanation was offered by Gregory Bateson in 1970, in "Form, Substance, and Difference" (in, pp. 455 – 71 of *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*). In this lecture he stated (p. 457):

> if an organism or aggregate of organisms sets to work with a focus on its own survival and thinks that that is the way to select its adaptive moves, its "progress" ends up with a destroyed environment. If the organism ends up destroying its environment, it has in fact destroyed itself.

And (p. 468):

> If you put God outside and set him vis-à-vis his creation and if you have the idea that you are created in his image, you will logically and naturally see yourself as outside and against the things around you. And as you arrogate all mind to yourself, you will see the world around you as mindless and therefore not entitled to moral or ethical consideration. The environment will seem to be yours to exploit. Your survival unit will be you and your folks or conspecifics against the environment of other social units, other races and the brutes and vegetables.

> If this is your estimate of your relation to nature and you have an advanced technology, your likelihood of survival will be that of a snowball in hell. You will die either of the toxic by-

products of your own hate, or, simply, of over-population and overgrazing. The raw materials of the world are finite.

Bateson identified (in effect, at least—as he doesn't mention "global warming") our habit of thinking of ourselves as separate from the rest of Nature as the fundamental cause of our problems (in conjunction with an advanced technology—which itself can be thought of as a "fruit" of that separation). Whether this separation occurred *before* God was thought of as an entity that is "outside" or, rather, this separation *led* to the development of the concept that God is and entity "out there, Bateson did not make clear. But once this separation occurred, it became a factor in human history, leading people to think that "progress" was occurring over time when in fact we have been heading for a cliff. (Perhaps *Gaia* has been the driving force in human history, and has had the "intent" of ridding Earth of that cancer, humankind!)

Although Bateson perceived our production of "toxic products," along with "over-population" and "overgrazing" as the likely *direct* factors that would "do us in," one must keep in mind that the lecture in question was delivered *43 years ago*. This fact helps us recognize that it's not what he stated about *direct* factors but the *ultimate* factor—that of separation—that is the significant part of Bateson's lecture.

Near the end of his lecture Bateson stated (p. 469):

> The most important task today is, perhaps, to learn to think in the new way. Let me say that I don't know how to think that way. Intellectually, I can stand here and I can give you a reasoned exposition of this matter; but if I am cutting down a tree, I still think "Gregory Bateson" is cutting down the tree. I am cutting down the tree. "Myself" is to me still an excessively concrete object, different from the rest of what I have been calling "mind."
>
> The step to realizing—to making habitual—the other way of thinking—so that one naturally thinks that way when one reaches out for a glass of water or cuts down a tree—that step is not an easy one.

I agree with Bateson that a new way of thinking is necessary, but would add that Bateson—although admitting that taking that step would not be an easy one—offered no recommendations as to how that new way of thinking could be achieved.

My solution to this is to begin by recognizing that although "public relations" efforts have tended to homogenize our thinking to an important degree—shaping it in a direction that serves the interests of the elite—the fact of the matter is that considerable variation *still* exists in people's thinking. I recommend that those whose thinking parallels mine to a significant degree (see, e.g., my *What Are Churches* For*?*, with its focus on "human design specifications" and proposal for Structured Interaction Groups [SIGs]; and my views on global warming as presented in numerous essays on this site) start creating eco-communities [1] that are as self-sufficient as possible (initially), in food production especially, and in effect start creating a New Society.

Given that those doing so would *already* have a mentality sympathetic to an elimination of the separation discussed by Bateson, and their participation in SIGs would help them move ever closer in that direction, those New Society people—*if they are able to survive the ravages of global warming*—will be able to develop a civilization that will involve harmonious relationships with Earth and *all* forms of life. Life will then—finally!—be worth living!

Diamond's ostensible purpose in writing *Collapse* was to present a body of information about past societal collapses that would be *useful*—information that would help us today plan, and act upon, activities designed to prevent our own society from collapsing.

However, given that Diamond seemingly fails to realize that (a) the primary threat, not only to our society but to our species, is global warming, (b) the underlying cause of that threat is the prevailing mentality (as Gregory Bateson has recognized), (c) it is now too late to prevent "runaway" from occurring (within a matter of decades, at most), (d) the various phenomena associated with "global warming" are likely to wipe out most of the world's population before the century is out, (e) the only hope for those who survive (if there are any!) is to pursue the eco-communitarian option, and (f) taking that option is likely to move those involved in the appropriate mental direction (of those not already headed in that direction) . . . given all of this, one must conclude that Diamond's book is not very helpful!—does not achieve its intended objective.

Diamond's huge book provides proof for the assertion that—at times, at least—"too much of a good thing is *not* wonderful"! Fortunately, in ordering my copy of the book from Amazon, I paid just one penny (plus $3.99 for postage and handling). Therefore, when the need arises for me to make room for another book in my "library," Diamond's *Collapse* book will be the first one to take a journey to the recycle bin.

Endnote

1. Although the communitarian groups of the nineteenth century differed one from another in various respects—religious vs. secular, democratic vs. authoritarian, etc.—a common theme with them was that "the answer to man's problems in a new industrial world was not revolution or reform but complete withdrawal from society and the creation of a new or parallel one." H. Roger Grant, editor, *An Icarian Communist in Nauvoo: Commentary by Emile Vallet*. Springfield, IL: Illinois State Historical Society, 1971, p. 7. This is Pamphlet No. 6 in their Pamphlet Series.

   The Icarians were a "utopian" group founded and led by Étienne Cabet [1788 – 1856]. Nauvoo—located on the Mississippi River, in the central-West part of Illinois—was founded by Latter Day Saint (i.e., Mormon) leader Joseph Smith in 1840. When Smith was killed by a mob in 1844, the Nauvoo Mormons were without a single leader until Brigham Young [1801 – 1877] was chosen as the leader. In 1847 Young led the bulk of the Mormons to Salt Lake City in Utah, but Sidney Rigdon [1793 – 1976] led a group of Mormons to Pennsylvania, and James J. Strang

[1813 – 1856] led another group to Voree, near Burlington, Wisconsin, and then to Beaver Island in Lake Michigan.

Strang was a polygamist and autocrat, and these factors made relationships with locals problematic. In 1856 Strang was shot and killed while standing on a dock, waiting to board the US naval gunboat *USS Michigan*. Shortly after this "mobs came from Mackinac Island and nearby St. Helena Island and drove the Strangites (then numbering approximately 2,600 persons) off Beaver Island, confiscating their property."

Today, the Lillian Snyder Icarian Living History Foundation has a web site, and provides a number of links to resources about the Icarians. I had contacted the Baxter-Snyder Center for Icarian Studies, at Western Illinois University, and one of the personnel at that Center kindly provided me with a copy of the pamphlet from which I quoted at the beginning of this note.

My earlier statement, in this essay, that I have been proposing that we "start creating eco-communities that are as self-sufficient as possible (initially), in food production especially, and in effect start creating a New Society," what I am in effect proposing is a restoration of (an updated version of) the communitarian movement that was such an important part of our history in the nineteenth century, and regarding which there is a vast literature (e.g., this and this).

Does *Understanding* Why Problems Exist Have Value?

Alton C. Thompson

Dr. Nafeez Ahmed, Director of the Institute for Policy Research and Development in London, in a recent interview with Jaisal Noor, of The Real News Network, said the following regarding Pres. O'Bomber's recent climate speech:

> But I think we need to have a reality check about what this plan actually means. And the reality is that the scientists are saying is that if you look at the nature of the pledges that are being put on the table not only by the United States but also by China, also by Europe, also by the U.K. and other major powers, unfortunately they're just not good enough in terms of avoiding the danger of climate catastrophe. And the problem is that we have accepted in the international policymaking circuit this limit of 2 degrees Celcius as a maximum limit for safe— for, you know, what is supposed to be the safe level of warming, and beyond that we enter the realm of dangerous climate change.
>
> Now, all the models are telling us that even if Obama's plan goes ahead with everything that it's going to have in it, that still will not be enough to prevent us from hitting dangerous climate change within this century and having a temperature rise of between 3 to 4 degrees Celsius at least, according to the most conservative models looking at this scenario of implementation of these pledges, at least. And that means once we get into that danger realm, you're going to trigger these positive feedbacks in the Arctic, in the Amazon rain forest, and other key ecosystems, which themselves will lead to further warming. And that's really the danger is that once we hit that danger zone, it's going to get worse.

Ahmad, it should be noted, is the author of the recently-published *A User's Guide to the Crisis of Civilisation: And How to Save It* (2010). Although I have not read this book, I am pleased that the very first chapter ("Climate Catastrophe") recognizes the threat to our species posed by global warming, and that Ahmad apparently recognizes that the various problems faced by humans currently are interrelated.

Ahmed's chapter's 2 – 6 are devoted to the other problems that Ahmed perceives as basic (respectively, energy scarcity, food insecurity, economic instability, international terrorism, and a militarization tendency), but what seems absent from the book—despite its subtitle—is any sort of realistic "plan" for addressing these various problems. That is, although Ahmed apparently uses a holistic approach in discussing problems, the book does not seem to present any sort of "plan" of a holistic nature. His Chapter 8—"Prognosis – The Post-Carbon Revolution and the Renewal of Civilization"—may present such ideas, but its short length (from p. 248 to p. 257) suggests that Ahmed's solution ideas are of such an abstract nature as to be of little practical value. True, I have not read the book, so this is mere speculation; but the table of contents of the book gives me no desire to actually *read* the book to find out for sure whether my perceptions of the book are justified.

It's entirely conceivable that Ahmed's analysis of our problems today is masterful. But even if it is, what must be kept in mind is that there is no *necessary* relationship between (a) thorough analysis and careful, detailed explanation, on the one hand, and (b) good proposals for action(s) to address those problems, on the other hand.

For example, one can argue that our pouring greenhouse gases into the atmosphere over the past 150 years has placed us in a position close to the threshold of climate "runaway." Given that this "pouring" is a result of our use of fossil fuels (which use has involved the transfer of carbon buried safely below the earth's surface to the atmosphere, in the form of CO_2), the "obvious" answer for preventing climate "runaway" is to cease doing so. However:

- Any society involves a great deal of "inertia" in the sense that it has a built-in tendency to *continue* to do what it's been doing. In our case (i.e., the case of the United States) there's no reason to expect a cessation of the use of carbon fuels in the foreseeable future.

- Even were this possible, the amount of increase in the global mean temperature that has already occurred (about 8º C.), in conjunction with the current "climate commitment" (at least 1º C., and perhaps as much as 1.5º C. or 1.6º C.), is such that the 2º C. rise (cited by Ahmed above) regarded by most climate scientists as critical (in the sense that after it is reached, climate "runaway" will begin) is inevitable.

- The latter fact means that global warming is likely to wipe out much, if not most, of the world's population—as scientists such as Britain's [Kevin Anderson] recognize.

Once one recognizes the above three points, one should realize that thorough analyses of our major problems today are useless. The primary question that arises, once we recognize the nature of the threat that we face, is: *Insofar as there is a chance that we can save ourselves, what is the course of action that is **required**?*

The brief answer to that question is: *Do what you can to **adapt** to the ravages that global warming will be inflicting on us within a matter of decades.*

The more *specific* answer that I would give is:

- Either move to, or create (with some like-minded others), an eco-community that is located away from the oceans, and also away from major urban agglomerations (to avoid an invasion by desperate people, once global warming becomes more severe).

- Make that eco-community as self-sufficient as possible (in food production especially), because as our economy disintegrates, you will not be able to *afford* to buy food, and at some point won't even be *able* to buy food.

- Make them good places to live. For example, become aware of the concept of "human design specifications" (see Chapters 2 – 5 of my *What Are Churches* For*?)*, discuss these with other members of your group, and arrive at a consensus of how to "operationalize" those concepts for your particular group.

Note that in offering this "solution" I made no reference to an *analysis* of our problems!

The first of the above three points might seem to be making a callous statement ("avoiding an invasion by desperate people"), and it *is*—to a degree. What I would add, though, is that I expect that those involved in an eco-communitarian movement would make a concerted effort to draw as many people into the movement as possible; that, in effect, they would become *evangelists* for the "salvation" of our species. And that such a movement would arise not only in this country, but others as well—and with those countries making sufficient progress in this direction making an effort to help those living in disadvantaged countries (such as island countries).

Our Disappearing Climates

Alton C. Thompson

`Did you say pig, or fig?' said the [Cheshire] Cat.

`I said pig,' replied Alice; `and I wish you wouldn't keep appearing and vanishing so suddenly: you make one quite giddy.'

`All right,' said the Cat; and this time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone.

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, p. 31

To say that a given area has a *climate* is to say that a certain pattern of atmospheric conditions exists in the area that is basically repeated year after year. That is, the pattern of temperature, humidity, precipitation, cloudiness, wind speed/direction, etc., for a given year is very similar to the pattern of those phenomena for the previous year, the year before that, etc. "Similarity" is not, of course, an either/or matter; it is, rather, a matter of *degree*, so that what is meant by "similarity" is a "high" degree of similarity, with "high" usually left undefined.

In a strict sense, every small area (defining "small" here as, e.g., one square mile) on earth has a unique climate—so that there are as many climate *types* as there are small areas. However, the fact that there are fairly clearly-defined *bioregions* on earth, with certain definite atmospheric characteristics associated with each, has given rise to the identification of *climate types* that correlate rather closely with those bioregions.

A problem is arising with the *concept* of "climate types," however: A process of "declimatization" is occurring! That is, for a given area—some areas more than others—there is developing an increasing dissimilarity between one year's atmospheric conditions and last year's, etc. What this means is that just as Carroll's Cheshire Cat gradually faded away, so is the very concept of "climate"—in the sense that increasingly, the word "climate" is losing its *referent*, thereby becoming increasingly like the word "unicorn" (i.e., a word for something that doesn't exist!).

As this "cat" fades away, rather than a grin remaining, there will be frowns—and worse. For more significant than this *academic* matter of the concept of "climate" becoming increasingly meaningless, are the *human* implications of this development; for these changes imply that:

- Crop production will be affected adversely, increasing the cost of those products which either *are* crops or *use* crops as a raw material—thereby reducing living standards, and eventuating in more and more starvation.

  .

- Droughts will become more common and severe, affecting not only food production adversely, but making wild fires more common and more destructive—of property and human and other life.

- Wind—including in the form of tornados and hurricanes—will cause more and more property damage and result in more and more loss of life.

- Flooding will become more common and more severe—with consequent increased loss of life and property damage.

- The increased erratic nature of weather conditions, in conjunction with an increasing global mean temperature, will mean increasing discomfort, with the use of air conditioning to reduce the discomfort intensifying the global warming problem!

Some scientists have been blaming changes in the jet stream for the recent anomalies in weather conditions—and they are correct in doing so, of course. The problem with this analysis, however, is that for reasons unknown they have tended to not go beyond that analysis, and state that it is global warming that is *directly* responsible for changes in jet stream patterns. In failing to do so they implicitly suggest that those changes in jet stream patterns are not anthropogenic—so that *our actions* are not responsible for those changes, and *therefore* there's nothing that we can do to "fix" this problem.

It's true, of course that there *is* nothing that we can do to achieve jet stream normality; but to suggest to people—if but implicitly—that our *only* choice now is to "ride out" the atmospheric anomalies that we will increasingly be experiencing is to do them a tremendous disservice.

Perhaps the weather/climate experts don't have the *courage* to tell people otherwise (because their jobs would be at risk if they did—because advertisers' threats to withdraw their financial support), but *I* regard it as important to alert people to the precarious situation that we humans are in at present—the fact that (a) it's now too late to halt further global warming, (b) it's likely that a "tipping point" will be crossed within a few decades, so that (c) the accelerating change that then begins is likely to cause societies to collapse and wipe out much of the world's population.

If more people were to become aware of these facts (or at least strong possibilities) *now*, they would be able to reach the logical conclusion that if they (or their children, grandchildren) are to have the best chance to survive, they will need to (a) act as individuals, acting individually or as members of small groups, to (b) engage in adaptive activities. Waiting for the government to act

on one's behalf would be the height of folly, given that it (the federal government in particular) is controlled by the economic elite, and the members of that elite live in an intellectual world far removed from reality.

The problems with the above "advice," of course, are that:

- Few are *aware* of the seriousness of our current situation—meaning that there is a need to try to make people aware of how dire our current situation is. (In large part, this lack of awareness—and especially of disbelief—is due to the efforts of some false "experts" deliberately to misinform the public, in the service of energy companies especially.)

- Even if one *is* aware of the seriousness of the threat posed by global warming, one may be at a loss as to *how to respond* to that knowledge.

- If, though, one *does* know that the threat posed by global warming is a real one, and also knows that one must try to adapt to the changes that will inevitably be occurring, one may (a) not know specifically *what* one should do or, (b) if one *does* know what to do, one may lack the financial resources to act (or be otherwise hindered in acting).

It's clear to me that various kinds of *leadership* are needed at present, and it is my hope that it begins to appear post haste!

It *Can*, It *Will*

Alton C. Thompson

What helps give force to the claim that the global mean temperature *will* change in the future—and specifically will *increase*—is that the global mean *has* changed significantly through geologic time. Temperatures in the distant past haven't been *recorded*, of course, for humans have been present on earth for but a small fraction of geologic time. But scientists have developed a variety of methods for determining past temperatures, and the following graph (derived from this web site) shows how average temperature has varied over geologic time (I have rotated the graph, and added the "More recent" and arrow for clarification purposes):
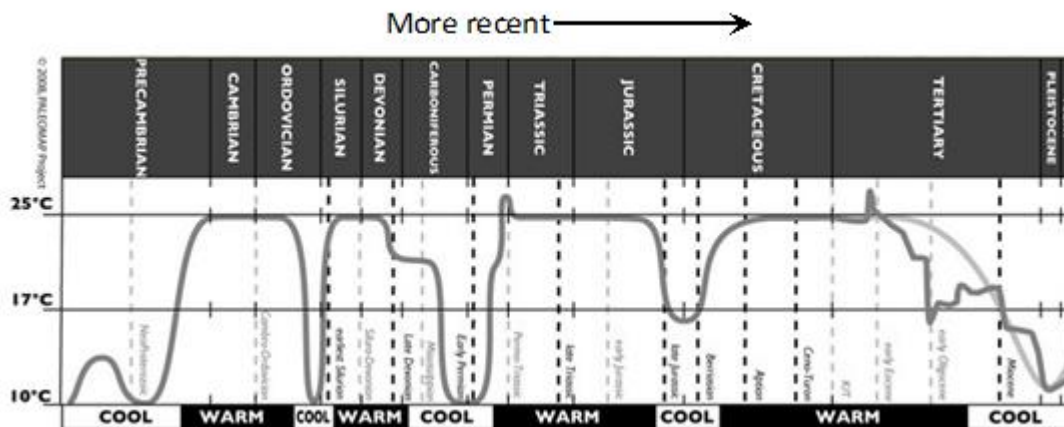
What this graph shows is that the average temperature has varied from about 10º C. to over 25º C., and that although there have been lengthy period during which little or no change occurred, when change *has* occurred, it has tended to be rather abrupt (from the standpoint of geologic time, that is).

The graph below (derived from an article by Don J. Easterbrook) shows temperature changes during a much shorter period of time, from 15,000 years BP (before the present) to 11,000 years BP (again, I have added the "More recent" and arrow to the figure—and notice that in this case the arrow points to the left rather than the right). Note also that this graph differs from the previous one in that it shows temperature fluctuations in the GISP2 Greenland ice core. (GISP2 stands for "Greenland Ice Sheet Project 2.") In this case notice that there was only one period during which temperature fluctuations were minor, and that the general pattern has been one of rather *rapid* change, either up or down.

The fact that significant temperature change has occurred during geologic time—even during the relatively short time period of from 15,000 years ago to 11,000 years ago—means that

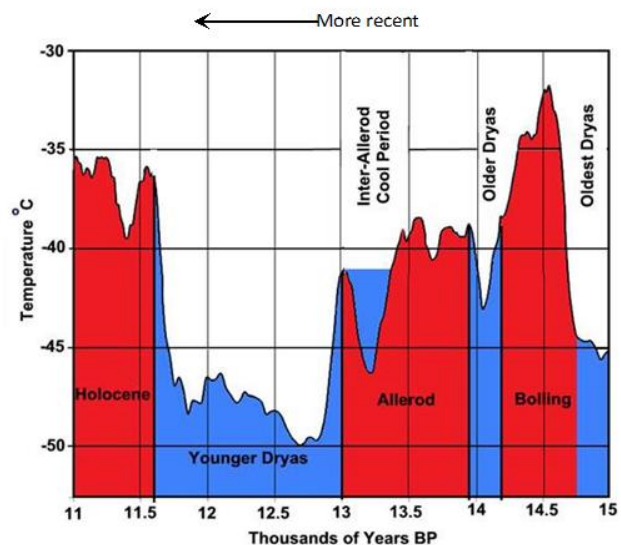significant change *can* occur in the future. That in itself does not, of course, mean that a significant increase in the global mean temperature *will* be occurring in the near future—for, after all, as the first graph shows, there *have* been long periods of time, geologically, when little or no important change occurred. In addition, even if the temperature *is* currently increasing, it has taken time for scientists to become convinced that a *trend* was developing.

Figure 2. Temperature fluctuations in the GISP2 Greenland ice core. Red = warm periods, blue = cold periods. (Plotted from data in Cuffy and Clow, 1997 and Alley, 2000)

For example, Spencer Weart has noted:

"In the 1930s, people realized that the United States and North Atlantic region had warmed significantly during the previous half-century. Scientists supposed this was just a phase of some mild natural cycle, with unknown causes. Only one lone voice, the amateur G [uy[.S[tewart[. Callendar [1898 – 1964], insisted that greenhouse warming was on the way. Whatever the cause of warming, everyone thought that if it happened to continue for the next few centuries, so much the better." (For those interested, Weart has written a history of this development, *The Discovery of Global Warming*, 2008. Also, James Hoggan has written a book discussing efforts to *deny* the existence of global warming, *Climate Cover-Up: The Crusade to Deny Global Warming*, 2009.)

Despite the fact that there was a time, not long ago, when many scientists feared that we were entering a new ice age, the (virtual) consensus with climate scientists today is that:

- The trend, rather, is for increased *heating*.

- The basic cause of this heating is human activities.

More specifically, most climate scientists today believe that:

- The global mean temperature has increased by about 0.8º C. since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (i.e., 1750).

- There is a correlation between that increase and the increase in "greenhouse" gases (such as carbon dioxide, CO_2).

- This correlation is not a mere coincidence but, rather, reflects a cause-and-effect relationship: The global mean has been increasing *in response* (with a lag) to increases in the concentration of greenhouse gases.

- *That* increase has occurred primarily because of the burning of fossil fuels by humans (which has involved the transfer of carbon buried safely below the earth's surface to the atmosphere). That is, the warming that has been occurring is *anthropogenic.*

- The greenhouse gases currently present in the atmosphere are of a level of concentration such that—*even without any more such gases being added to the atmosphere as a result of human activities*—the global mean will increase by at least 1° C., and perhaps as much as 1.5° C or 1.6° C. (what is referred to as "climate commitment").

- The consensus with climate scientists is that if the global mean were to increase by 2° C., "runaway" is likely to begin—i.e., the increase is likely to do so at an increasing *rate.* Put another way, 2° C. is regarded as a "tipping point."

- The reason for this is that global warming tends to be a process that "feeds on itself." For example, as warming proceeds, more and more ice and snow melt, thereby exposing bare ground—which, in being darker, will tend to absorb, rather than reflect, incoming solar radiation, with the heated ground then re-radiating long-wave heat energy into the atmosphere, thereby heating the atmosphere. Also, as permafrost thaws, it releases methane gas, which is a much more potent greenhouse gas than is carbon dioxide.

- The above two points imply that at some point in the future warming will have proceeded to the point where an *acceleration* of warming will begin. And if we add in the matter of "climate commitment," the suggestion here is that the tipping point will be reached *even if humans would stop pouring greenhouse gases into the atmosphere **tomorrow**!*

- Given that the likelihood of *that* occurring is ZERO (!), it is to be expected that not only will global warming continue, but that at some point in the future—perhaps within the next 30 years, if not sooner—change will begin to become rather abrupt, so that not only will (a) the average temperature begin to increase rapidly, but (b) weather will become even more erratic than it has been the past few years, (c) the number of storms will increase, and (d) the number of *severe* storms will increase—and those are just the *atmospheric* changes to be expected. Those atmospheric changes will result in an increase in flooding, wild fires, the inundation of coastal areas, the spread of diseases, starvation, violence, etc.

What should be clear from the above discussion is that:

- The "progress" of global warming to date has been such that efforts to halt further warming are likely to be futile. At some point in the near future geo-engineering efforts *may* be instituted by national governments, but such efforts are likely to fail—with the possibility, even, that they will *exacerbate* the situation by introducing *new* problems. For that reason, let us hope that governments are not so foolish as to attempt such efforts anyway. (Unfortunately, to hope that governments will refrain from foolish measures is to hope for the impossible!)

- Given that trying to prevent further warming may not occur—and if it *does*, may do more harm than good—the "aware" individual will realize that if s/he is to have any chance of surviving the ravages that global warming will be inflicting on us humans in a matter of decades, s/he will need to engage in *adaptive* activities—a matter that I have commented on, in varying degrees of detail, in previous essays on this site.

In summary, there is no question that temperature has varied greatly through geologic time, and for that reason there is good reason to expect that it will *continue* to do so in the future. Despite the fact that there was time, a few years ago, when climate scientists feared that we were entering a new *ice age*, the fear *now* is just the opposite. Now, however, the feeling is not so much a vague *fear* but *conviction* that (a) warming is occurring, and (b) doing so because of human activities. In addition, although the impression that one gets from listening to the "news," including speeches by our political leaders (such as Pres. O'Bomber), and talking with others, etc., that we are *not* living in a crisis period, the fact of the matter is that we *are*.

What's needed, then, today is that leadership arise to (a) not only *inform* people of this fact of crisis, but (b) *propose* courses of action to respond to this threat, and (c) *initiate* actual programs having the intent of at least *trying* to save at least *some* people from this ominous threat.

Will this occur? It will . . . but only if those who understand the problem we face and have capabilities—intellectual, personality, financial, etc.—to address it begin to act.

A "New" Debate?

Alton C. Thompson

In the "Crossroads" section of the *Milwaukee Urinal* (whose *official* name is *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*), on July 7, 2013, the lead article was "A New Debate Over the Climate." The article consisted of two parts, "My Plan Will Cut Carbon, Protect Us From the Worst," a follow-up, by Pres. O'Bomber, of his recent climate speech; and "Obama's War on Coal Equals a War on Wisconsin's Jobs," by Kurt R. Bauer, the President and CEO of Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce.

What the article implied is that:

- Global warming *is* occurring.

- There are but two perspectives on how to *respond* to global warming.

- O'Bomber's views represent the "left's" perspective on how to address global warming, and Bauer's views adequately represent the "right's" perspective on this matter.

The editorial board of the *Urinal* is, of course, to be commended for having their "debate" consist of two "believers" in global warming, rather than a "believer" and a "denier." But in limiting their "debate" to O'Bomber and Bauer they have misled the general public, and helped contribute to a sense of complacency in the general public.

O-Bomber noted that the effects of global warming were being felt now:

> Firefighters are braving longer wildfire seasons. Farmers are seeing crops wilt one year and wash away the next. Families in the West are worried about water that's drying up

And he added that we can fully expect that the effects will become more severe over time. Bauer, however, mentioned *none* of those effects. In fact he totally *ignored* the effects of global warming, focusing his attention rather on the effects of O'Bomber's *policies*, if implemented, on *employment* in Wisconsin.

Bauer was being the more clever in this "debate," because he knew that people were more concerned with the here-and-now than the distant future; and that by focusing on employment effects at a time of high unemployment, he was able to turn the reader's attention away from problems posed by global warming—which, after all, were of a more future nature.

Had O'Bomber anticipated that Bauer would divert the discussion in this way, he might have addressed the matter of employment in his own essay. But, of course, he wasn't *aware* that his

essay would be presented in a *debate* format—this was the work of editors at the *Urinal*, who thereby disadvantaged him in the "debate." Thus, if Bauer "comes off" as the more clever one in the "debate," this is because of the *editors'* efforts—who may have further disadvantaged O'Bomber by asking Bauer to respond to remarks made by O'Bomber a day or two earlier. If this was the case it was a "dirty trick," thereby evincing an utter lack of objectivity on the part of the editors.

The public was done no favor by this "debate," because neither presenter (Bauer in particular) seemed aware of the *nature* of the threat posed by global warming—or, *if* aware, was willing to *state* what he knew. Neither alerted the reader to the very strong possibility that global warming threatened their *way of life* "down the road"—i.e., within a few decades, perhaps even sooner. So that sooner or later, *every* reader would be feeling the impact of global warming.

Given this, no one learns from these two essays that they should start thinking about how to *adapt* to the changes that inevitably lie ahead; so that unless a reader also obtains information from *other* sources, s/he will make no efforts to engage in adaptive efforts.

One conclusion to draw from this article is that it is further evidence that the press in this country fails us miserably. On the one hand, rather than journalists being involved in hard-nosed investigative reporting, they merely repeat what their sources tell them—being fearful that if they question their sources, their sources will "dry up," leaving them without anything to report, a sure prescription for joblessness on their part.

On the other hand, journalists treat events so "lightly" that they, in effect, *misinform* the reader—because their "light touch" involves failing to report important details, many of which involve conflicting views, regarding that which is reported on. Put another way, the "reports" of journalists tend to be so sanitized that there is a good basis for regarding them as *criminal*—for "misinform" is merely a polite substitute for "lie."

One expects the energy companies, in their internet postings and advertisements on television, to emphasize their role in providing employment, to use such catch phrases as "energy independence" and "secure energy future—and to skip over the fact that use of their products endangers our continued existence as a society, if not species. One does *not* expect the press, however, consist of intellectual prostitutes ("presstitutes")—but increasingly it *is* peopled by such individuals—individuals who are afraid to publicly question the misleading claims of energy companies.

Of course, it's not just the press that's disgusting in this country. When "country" singers are not singing about sex, trucks, and mama, they display their patriotism—as in this Lee Greenwood song:

> I'm proud to be an American where at least I know I'm free,
> And I won't forget the men who died who gave that right to me,

> And I gladly stand up next to you and defend her still today,
> 'Cause there ain't no doubt I love this land God Bless the U.S.A.

They display their self-centeredness, and their ignorance of the evil that our military has been engaged in over the decades—which they then inadvertently ask God to bless! The July 4 issue of *The Progressive* contained several excellent articles critical of patriotism, such as this and this.

Thomas Jefferson stated, in 1789:

> "The most effectual means of preventing [the perversion of power into tyranny are] to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large, and more especially to give them knowledge of those facts which history exhibits, that possessed thereby of the experience of other ages and countries, they may be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes, and prompt to exert their natural powers to defeat its purposes."

Today, we are not only tyrannized (if by a velvet glove, rather than an iron fist) by a small minority, but most of us are "kept in the dark" under the influence of that minority—although the journalists (and songwriters) *directly* responsible for this sad state of affairs may not see the situation this way; or may *sense* it, but are able to *suppress* that knowledge.

The minority in control of our society is leading us all toward a cliff, the paradox here being that this minority has been able to convince *itself* that this is *not* the case. Or—even more pathetically—the individuals in this category are too ill-informed to realize the precarious situation that we humans are in at present.

Because of these facts, it is difficult to imagine many surviving the ravages of global warming once "runaway" begins—*members of that minority included!*

When We Dead Awaken

Alton C. Thompson

A commentator on the recently-posted "People Get Ready: 'Unprecedented' Weather Glimpses Century Ahead" notes that there is "an indisputable correlation between the rise in greenhouse gases, methane and nitrous oxide, and the rise in human population numbers" and concludes from that fact that

> It's long past the time for a civil, humane and very needed global policy focused on zero population growth (actually negative population growth is what's really needed). A reduction in human population worldwide would be a boon for Earth; but even more so for the wild creatures whose well being and survival ALSO depends on a healthy biosphere.

Although I agree with the author of this comment that there is such a thing as "overpopulation," the commentator's conclusion that we need ZPG (zero population growth), or even *negative* population growth, has at least two flaws. Before commenting on those flaws, however, let me note that "overpopulation" itself is a rather tricky concept. One might argue that the *optimal* population size for earth is that size which could be sustained indefinitely. But this raises at least six questions:

- In determining this "optimal" value, has the fact that the larger the population, the more *area* required to "house" those people been taken into consideration? Given that the land area of the earth is finite (changing but minutely during a given person's lifetime), land used for housing people is necessarily *at the expense* of other "uses" (e.g., it involves encroachment on the habitat of other species)—plus the more land used for housing people, the less land remaining for their *esthetic* enjoyment.

- What *standard of living* level is assumed by this statement?

- What is the *per capita* energy usage associated with that standard living?

- Is the energy used assumed to be *renewable* or *non-renewable* (and thereby a source of greenhouse gases)?

- What changes in *technology* will occur over time that will affect the *nature* of energy usage?

- Even if we *were* able to determine the "optimal" population level for the planet, from a sustainability standpoint (doubtful!), why use "sustainability" as the relevant criterion?

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Wouldn't a level somewhat *lower* than a "sustainability" level be more desirable (for a variety of reasons)?

My point here, of course, is that "overpopulation" is a difficult concept with which to grapple.

To return to the commentator's claim that what's needed is ZPG, and even *negative* population growth, a part of the problem with that conclusion—as recognized by another commentator on the article—is that "The larger problem is consumption and not population." I assume that what this individual means in stating that is that:

- Consumption involves both goods and services.

- Both sorts of consumption usually involve energy usage—the consumption of *services* involving travel to and from the place where the service is offered, that travel involving the use (direct or indirect) of fossil fuels; the consumption of *goods* involving not only that, but the use (again, direct or indirect) of fossil fuels in the production of those goods, their extraction, the transportation of "raw" materials and finished products, the travel ("journey to work") by the employees involved, etc.

- The more one consumes, the higher the level of one's "pollution responsibility."

Whether this commentator is correct in saying that the "larger" problem is consumption rather than population size, the fact of the matter is that *both* are a part of the problem. For we can think of the total emission of greenhouse gases for, e.g., a given year in terms of this formula:

$$T = P \ x \ pc$$

where,

T = Total amount of greenhouse gases emitted during a given year.

P = The population of the world at the midpoint of the year.

pc = The *per capita* "contribution" of each individual—i.e., the average "pollution responsibility"

Now if the total amount of greenhouse gases emitted currently is excessive—which it is!—the "obvious" solution to this problem is to:

- Reduce the population size of the world—by humane means, of course (rather than by the killing off of people (via drone strikes, etc.) that is so popular with our leaders, such as George W.Bush and Barack O'Bomber).

- Reduce the *per capita* "contribution" value (by reducing the use of fossil fuels—i.e., the energy source responsible for greenhouse gas emissions).

- Both.

But is this "obvious" answer the *correct* one?

The problem with this "answer" is that it is *now too late* to prevent a "tipping point" from being reached, and then crossed: The (a) increase in global mean that has already occurred (i.e., 0.8° C.), combined with (b) the current "climate commitment" (i.e., 1° C to 1.6° C.) and (c) fact that we will *continue* to use fossil fuels on a significant scale well into the foreseeable future mean that "runaway" climate change is inevitably in our future.

That fact means that at some point in the future (beginning a few decades from now) population will decline, as will the emission of greenhouse gases—but *not* because the decline in both cases will be *voluntary*. Rather, they will decline because:

- The various phenomena associated with global warming will wipe out most of the world's population.

- Greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced substantially for the simple reason that there will be few people alive to *emit* the gases!

Neither the "People Get Ready" article nor the comments that follow the article seem to "get" these facts. With such a widespread lack of ignorance regarding our current predicament—including on the part of many educated people who visit progressive web sites—I find it difficult to be optimistic about the future.

What especially bothers me is that I sent one of my recent essays on global warming to both my married daughter in Massachusetts and my married son in central Wisconsin, but have received no response from either. My son and family visited us over the weekend, and neither my son nor his wife made any mention of the essay! All four of these adults are intelligent people with at least college degrees, and the fact that I can't make even my own "kin" concerned with this problem distresses me to no end.

What can be done to wake people up?! *That*, for me, is the "million dollar question" today!! Why is it that the brilliant Chris Hedges can write brilliant analyses, but offer no useful suggestions regarding what we should do to address our current problems?

The title the I chose for my essay—"When We Dead Awaken"—is the title of Henrik Ibsen's [1828 – 1906) last play. I chose it because I fear that we are so *intellectually* dead today that within a few decades most humans will be *physically* dead.

A Repeat Performance?

]Alton C. Thompson

The Scripture of several religions contains a story of a Great Flood that destroyed all living creatures, except those aboard an ark. The story itself is a combination of *two* stories, "the Jahwist (YHWH) source and the Priestly (Elohim) source) that were interwoven into the final canonical form of Genesis 6-9.[3] Although there are differences in characteristic style and vocabulary, overall they are not contradictory. [1] However, where apparent contradictions do exist, they were not typically viewed as mistakes by Jewish scholars, but as allusions to deeper meanings."

Stories of floods are widespread, suggesting that they have some basis in actual flooding events. In fact, "Christian geologist Ward Sanford has proposed that the filling of the Persian Gulf after the last ice age could have been a catastrophic event giving rise to the flood stories. He proposes a silt dam near the Hormuz Strait which temporarily held back the rising sea levels. 'If a breach in the dam was flowing at, say, 100 times the flow of the present-day Tigris and Euphrates, it would have taken several months for the Persian Gulf to fill - the exact sort of timing referred to by the flood account.'"[15]

Also, marine archeologist Robert Ballard, acting in response to a theory put forward by two Columbia University scientists that a great flood had occurred in the Black Sea region, began investigating the matter with colleagues:

> Four hundred feet below the surface, they unearthed an ancient shoreline, proof to Ballard that a catastrophic event did happen in the Black Sea. By carbon dating shells found along the shoreline, Ballard said he believes they have established a timeline for that catastrophic event, which he estimates happened around 5,000 BC. Some experts believe this was around the time when Noah's flood could have occurred.

Interestingly, however, "Ancient Shuruppak, Ur, Kish, Uruk, Lagash, and Ninevah all present evidence of flooding. However, the evidence comes from different times.[10] **In Israel, [however,] there is no such evidence of a widespread flood.**"[11] (bolding added) Thus, the ancient Hebrews had a story of a great flood, not because they had *themselves* experienced one, but because they borrowed the story from their neighbors, and added a theological twist to the story.

I should perhaps add that the Biblical assumption of an Edenic sort of situation at some time prior to the flood (but not immediately so), may be a reference to earlier gatherer-hunter existence. As noted anthropologist Douglas P. Fry has argued:

Drawing on archeology and fieldwork on hunter-gatherer bands from around the world, Fry debunks the idea that war and conflict is ancient and inevitable and that there is an inborn instinct of aggression in humans. Fry shows that, far from being natural, warfare actually appeared quite recently along with changes in social organization and especially the rise of states. Strong anthropological finding, which has been replicated over different studies, is that there is a correlation between increasing social complexity and the likelihood of war.

What this means is that my argument, in numerous previous essays, that an eco-communitarian movement is needed in response to the global warming threat, can be extended to cover ending the threat of war as well!

Which leads me to the basic point that I wish to make here, however, that *global warming* can thought of as a flood of sorts; for just as floods can be hugely destructive, so is global warming *likely* to be—the main difference being that floods do their damage so quickly that one has no advance warning of their occurring, and is thereby unable to protect oneself from them. Noah, of course, was given advance warning of an impending flood, and therefore had an opportunity to prepare for it, but . . .the story of Noah is "*just* a story."

Global warming has been known about since the time of Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius [1859 – 1927], but has been recognized as a threat for just a few decades now. The fact of the matter, however, is that we *have* recognized it as a threat for several decades now, so that we have no excuse for not preparing for it. I say "preparing for" because it is now too late to halt further global warming, meaning that our only option now is that of trying to adapt.

John Todd, and his wife, Nancy Jack Todd, have been among the most significant individuals to not only recognize the threat posed by global warming, but to engage in research to help us adapt to that threat. Interestingly, the Todds—who "co-founded the New Alchemy Institute to do both fundamental research into aspects of biology and disciplines as well as to apply biological science to technology"—built (in the 1970s) an "Ark for P.E.I." (Prince Edward Island) in John's native Canada. The fact that this was referred to as an "Ark" indicates that they thought of themselves as modern Noahs, anticipating a flood of a different sort.

Unfortunately, few people have heard of the Todds, and although many today are at least dimly aware of global warming, few take it seriously. What *that* means is that global warming is likely to destroy most of the world's population (as, e.g., British scientist Kevin Anderson has argued), and may even render our species extinct! If Mother Earth were alive, it would probably say: "Good riddance!" (For John Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, Earth—Gaia to them—*is* alive!)

Pres. James E. ("Jimmy") Carter, in a 1977 speech, referred to the energy crisis of the time (but not including global warming!) as the "moral equivalent of war" (alluding to a 1910 essay by philosopher William James [1842 – 1910]). Evidently, however, Americans prefer wars in which *they* do the killing, rather than Gaia!

How Sane Are We *Really*?

Alton C. Thompson

Almost 60 years ago psychologist (and much more!) Erich Fromm [1900 – 1980] questioned (in *The Sane Society*, 1955, 1991) the sanity of Western societies, and presented his ideas as to what constitutes a truly sane society. In questioning the sanity of Western societies, Fromm may have been the first individual *explicitly* to do so—although the utopian literature over the centuries, e.g., *implicitly* did this.

Early on, Fromm identified aspects of Western societies that provided evidence for questioning their sanity:

- We have been killing each other over the centuries in (p. 4) "an arrangement which we call 'war . . . .'"

- We (p. 5) restrict the production of certain crops—while millions of people are going without food.

- Our media (p. 5) "fill the minds of men [and women and children] with the cheapest trash . . . ."

- Although many now have an abundance of "free" time, few know how to use it wisely.

Fromm noted that (p. 6) psychiatrists and psychologists have tended to believe that insofar as a society has a mental health problem, the problem is one of "unadjusted" *individuals* being present in the society. That is, the society in question is taken as the "norm," with the expectation that individuals *can* and (implicitly) *should* adapt to the society.

In other words, psychiatrists and psychologists have *assumed*—without offering any *empirical* support for this tacitly-held position—that any individual has the *capacity* to adapt to the society within which the person lives; and have further made the unwarranted *value judgment* that an individual *should* adapt to the society within which s/he happens to be living.[1]

Although Fromm did not, for the above reasons, accuse his fellow psychiatrists and psychologists with laziness and intellectual cowardice (among other possibilities), *I* would! Being more of a gentleman than me, Fromm simply noted the possibility that the problem of *individual* "unadjustment" was, in actuality, one of the "unadjustment of the culture itself." In fact, Fromm then introduced the phrase "pathology of normalcy" to refer to Western societies as they were in their allegedly "normal" state.

Were Fromm alive today, I suspect that he would declare that since 1955 Western societies—with the United States "leading the pack"—have become "progressively" [2] *less* sane, and would cite various new developments in support of that conclusion.

Among the new possibilities that he might cite are these:

- The global warming that has been occurring has resulted in the melting of arctic ice, thereby enabling drilling for oil to occur in that area—the use of which will contribute to further global warming! If the term "insane" cannot be applied to this drilling, I don't know what *can* be! (See this web site for a number of articles on the matter.)

- Greenpeace activists have recently climbed London's Shard skyscraper to protest this drilling.

Of these two actions the former is clearly the *most* insane (given its causal implications for the rest of us), but one can ask of the skyscraper climbing: How sane is *it* actually? I would ask two questions relative to this climbing:

- Is it likely to be *effective*? That is, as a result of this "stunt" will energy companies cease their efforts to extract petroleum from the arctic region?

- If it *were* effective, would the threats posed by global warming disappear?

Unfortunately, I am forced to answer *both* of these questions in the negative—which leads me to question not only the sanity of the officials of the companies doing the drilling, but that of the climbers and their supporters.

The companies involved in the drilling are in the business of making money; and given that their officials have a fixation on next quarter's profits, and that they have a substantial investment in their operations in the arctic, the probability that they will withdraw from the arctic anytime soon is zero (making protest efforts rather pointless).

Even *were* they to do so, the problem is that that (a) the increase in the global mean that has already occurred (i.e., about 0.8° C. since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution) in conjunction with (b) current "climate commitment" (between 1° C. and 1.6° C.) and (c) the fact that there's no reason to expect a cessation of carbon dioxide "pollution" any time soon—in conjunction, also, (d) with the fact that most climate scientists believe that a 2° C. increase represents the upper limit of "safety" (after which "runaway" is likely)—means that it is virtually certain that the "tipping point" will be reached, and crossed, within a few decades (if not earlier!).

When—not *if*!—that occurs, societies will begin to collapse, and most of the world's population will be wiped out—about 90% according to British climate scientist Kevin Anderson.

What this means is that *regardless* of what we do in response to these (very strong) possibilities, it's likely that few of our children and grandchildren will survive the ravages of global warming. *That* fact—*if*, that is, one is *aware* of it [3]—may cause one to "lose" oneself in diversions, or to accomplish suicide, etc. The *sane* person, however, will ask: "What do I need to do to maximize the probability that I, my children, and my grandchildren, will survive the changes that will be occurring as global warming proceeds?"

Interestingly, just as Fromm proposed (pp. 275 – 78) "communitarian socialism" as a cure for the ills of industrial society (and defended this proposal on pp. 279 – 92), so have I proposed, in several previous essays on this site, something similar—the creation of small, largely self-sufficient eco-communities—as not only a way to try to adapt to the changes incumbent on global warming, but as a way—using the concept of "human design specifications" [4]—to create communities within which life would be worth living—finally!

Endnotes

1. Note that an implicit assumption here is that if one is dissatisfied with the society within which one is living, one should not respond to that dissatisfaction by emigrating! If this assumption were to be actually followed, the populations of the Americas and Australia, e.g., would now be very different from what they are!

2. Fromm might note that although "progress" has occurred in several senses—e.g., I am composing this essay while sitting in front of a computer screen, rather than using a typewriter—from a *human* standpoint there has been *anything but* progress. By the way, "The first typewriter to be commercially successful was invented in 1868 by Americans Christopher Latham Sholes, Carlos Glidden and Samuel W. Soule in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, although Sholes soon disowned the machine and refused to use, or even to recommend it."

3. A fact of which few seem to be aware, however, in large part because our media do such a poor job of reporting about global warming.

4. See Chapters 2 – 4 in my *What Are Churches* For*?*

Is Anyone Else Discouraged?

Alton C. Thompson

Fracking "has commenced in . . . [various] parts of the country where the BLM [Bureau of Land Management [1]] holds mineral rights, particularly out West. 'We're drilling all over the place,' President Obama told an audience in New Mexico last year, announcing plans to open millions more acres to the oil and gas industry. In the way of protection, however, Obama's new rules follow the Pennsylvania model, barely scratching the surface when it comes to monitoring what occurs below."

The author of this passage, Peter Rugh [2], describes in excruciating, disgusting detail what corporations in this country are doing—with the approval, and more, of our government—to bring the world closer to doomsday. It's infuriating enough that the companies involved have no respect for the lives of the people in areas being fracked; but what's doubly obnoxious is that our president—Pres. O'Bomber—is "aiding and abetting" these actions.

Just a short time ago Pres. O'Bomber gave a climate speech in which he stated, e.g., that "our planet is changing in ways that will have profound impacts on all of humankind." O'Bomber's *actions*, however, demonstrate that he is a hypocrite, an individual lacking genuine concern about people's well-being in the here-and-now, as well as in the future—an extremely peculiar fact, given that he has two young daughters.

What fracking by companies, and its facilitation by our government, represents is a total disregard for our continued existence as humans. *That*'s not the point that I wish to emphasize in this essay, however. What I'd like to focus on, rather, is the *philosophy*—or *ideology* [3], if you will—that lies behind fracking—that of *utilitarianism*. I need to make clear, however, that by "utilitarianism" I am not referring to the meaning given that term by economists but, rather, am using the term in a less formal way—thinking of utilitarian thinking as claiming that the *value* of something is limited to its *monetary* value and *usefulness*, with "usefulness" being thought of in rather myopic terms, pertaining just to the here-and-now.

The passage in Rugh's article that resonated most with me is this one (as one who, in growing up in rural/small town Wisconsin, grew up close to Nature):

> Those wondering what opportunity looks like to drillers in regions originally set aside for conservation need only visit the Allegheny National Forest in Western Pennsylvania, a state that has opened its arms to drillers in recent years. Nearly 4,000 oil and gas wells were drilled in the Allegheny between 2005 and 2011.

"Where there were once remote areas of the forest there is now oil and gas infrastructure," said Ryan Talbott of the Allegheny Defense Project. "If you are a recreationist going to go out and go hiking, camping, fishing, what might have been your favorite area before is now a sea of roads and pipelines and well sites."

This passage, for me, illustrates extremely well the utilitarian orientation of the frackers—reflecting, in fact, and unfortunately, the *dominant* intellectual orientation of people in our society. Must we think *just* in utilitarian terms? Must we view Earth as *just* a resource? Can't we also perceive Earth as a place to recreate, to refresh our spirits? Can't we also perceive Earth as being *beautiful*?—thereby recognizing that *esthetics* should play an important role in our lives.

Associated with the mentality that is oriented to *usefulness* is a mentality that insists that we are *knowledgeable*, that there is little *mystery* in the world. This reminds me of a statement that I read recently somewhere, that goes something like this:

When I was young, I thought that there is no mystery in the world, that our knowledge is complete. Now that I am older, I know that there is *only* mystery.

Why is it important to perceive beauty and mystery in other people, in other species, in inanimate Nature? Perceiving in this way has profound implications for how one *relates* to other people, other species, inanimate Nature: The "do no harm" principle, at the very least, will guide one's behavior, and perhaps even one of a more *positive* nature.

If such a principle were, and had been, the governing principle throughout the world over the centuries, the world would be very different from what it now is—would be a far *better* place to live. We might not have all of the amenities of modern life, but we would have a *sustainable* way of life that would provide satisfactions that our current materialistic way of life simply cannot.

I, for one, in thinking about the direction that we are heading become very discouraged. I *wish* that I could discern reasons for optimism—but can't think of any! Can you?

Endnotes

1. The BLM is a part of the United States Department of the Interior.

2. Rugh is "a facilitator for Occupy Wall Street Environmentalist Solidarity and Chair of the Action Committee of Shut Down Indian Point Now! He writes for *Socialist Worker* and Terraspheres.com. His poems have appeared in the *People's Tribune* (San Francisco) and *Left Curve*."

3. Briefly, I think of a "philosophy" as a well-developed system of thought whose *factual* premises are well-founded, and whose *value* premises are pro-life in a very broad sense; and an "ideology" as a less-well-developed system of thought that is biased in favor of certain interests over other legitimate interests.

Why Politics is Not the Answer

Alton C. Thompson

Political units are units within which *governing* occurs, the (theoretical) justification for a given unit's existence being that those who *engage* in the governing do so for the *benefit* of those they govern (rather than themselves!).

Political units can be thought of as existing at different *levels*; in *my* case those levels are:

- My family—consisting of my wife, myself, and our three children (two of whom now have their own families). What is expected of us as parents is that we support one another, provide support to our children, not abuse them, help them develop in a way that they will be able to support themselves when of age, be good citizens, etc.

The other levels "above" me perform a variety of functions, ones appropriate for their level (theoretically), but having in common (again, theoretically) that the performance of those functions will contribute to the well-being of those residing in that unit. Given this fact of variety, to prevent becoming tedious here, I will list just one function for each of the succeeding levels.

- The village within which I live ("village" being a legal concept, so that a "village" has characteristics different from, e.g., a "city"): It provides the streets upon which I move.

- The county, which provides parks within which I may relax, play tennis, etc.

- The state, which strives to provide an environment attractive to employers, and actively seeks new employers.

- The nation, whose military defends me from external aggressors—both individual terrorists or groups of terrorists, and rogue nations. (What an unfunny joke this is!)

I have not included the United Nations on this list because of its decision-making insignificance.

My reason for noting that a variety of political units exist, from the individual family to the UN, is that the problem of *global warming* now facing us humans, being one of a *global* nature, would seem to qualify as a problem that is of a nature that the United Nations—the only political organization we have of a *global* nature—should be addressing it. However, given the UN's ineffectiveness as a political body, our expectation is that *national* governments—such as that of the United States—need to assume leadership in addressing this problem.

In the case of the United States, however, one reason for pessimism regarding the national government's potential leadership is that it is in the control of interests—such as the energy companies—whose intellectual orientation is to (a) profits in (b) the short run. That is, the control of the government is exercised, not by "we the people," but, rather, by an elite—one that for reasons that are baffling (to me) assumes that tomorrow will be virtually the same as today . . . forever and forever.

That's not the *only* problem we have, however, so far as leadership on a national level is concerned. Consider this (from an article by Eric W. Dolan, dated May 1, 2013):

> Research by David C. Barker of the University of Pittsburgh and David H. Bearce of the University of Colorado uncovered that belief in the biblical end-times was a motivating factor behind the resistance to curbing climate change [something that is not possible, however, I would add].
>
> "[T]he fact that such an overwhelming percentage of Republican citizens profess a belief in the Second Coming (76 percent in 2006, according to our sample) suggests that government attempts to curb greenhouse [gas] emissions would counter stiff resistance even if every Democrat in the country wanted to curb them," Barker and Bearce wrote in their study, which will be published in the June issue of *Political Science Quarterly*.

Let us ignore here the authors' incorrect assumption that climate change *can* be curbed, and concentrate on the finding itself—that the vast majority of Republicans believe in a "Second Coming," by which they mean that they expect that Jesus will return to earth "soon." Let me note first that there are several problems with this assumption:

- It demonstrates an abysmal ignorance of simple arithmetic: Given that these people presumably also believe that Jesus was resurrected three days after having died, *that* would constitute a second coming, and any future "coming" would be a *third* one! (Regarding the matter of ignorance/stupidity, also see this, this, and this.)

- *None* of the four canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) has Jesus say that there will be a coming after his (alleged) resurrection and subsequent ascension (into Heaven). It's true that John's gospel refers to a *paraclete* (i.e., Helper, Advocate, Holy Spirit in 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7), but in none of those gospels is that Being identified as Jesus—so that in none of those cases is it possible to derive the idea of a Second Coming (of Jesus) from that gospel.

In addition, there are other reasons for not equating the "coming" discussed in John's gospel (the author ostensibly quoting Jesus) with Jesus:

- The *paraclete* is referred to as a *Spirit* rather than a person-like Being.

- It is referred to as being *continuously* present upon Jesus's departure (just to those who *seek* its presence?). Note that the Second Coming, as conceived by some Christians, would, by contrast, be a *discrete* event.

- Its *function* is to reveal truths about God—so that it thereby is a *substitute*, in a sense, for Jesus, and—as a Spirit—of an entirely different *nature* than the human being Jesus. (Many Christians, of course, would quarrel with my characterization of Jesus as a human.)

Given the above, it should be clear that for Christians—whether Republicans or "regular" (!) people—to believe in the imminent return of Jesus, is to use a source(s) that lacks credibility!

What we have then, is an *additional* reason (beyond corporate control) for not looking to our national government for "salvation":

- Republicans are in control of the U. S. House of Representatives.

- The vast majority of Republicans believe in Jesus's imminent (in what they call) Second Coming (but *should* call *Third* Coming—and *would* if they understood simple arithmetic!), and therefore cannot be expected to be overly concerned with global warming.

Given these facts, it is clear that if one *is* genuinely concerned about this problem, one will:

- Recognize that it is now too late to halt the further "progress" of global warming.

- Regard it as incredibly foolish to look to the national government (or even other levels of government, for that matter) for efforts to address the problem of global warming in any meaningful way.

- Act as an individual—by oneself or in conjunction with a few like-minded others—to begin engaging in *adaptive* activities—the only activities that give us any degree of hope for survival.

Combating the Propaganda

Alton C. Thompson

There is an advertisement, repeated with annoying frequency on television, sponsored by the oil and natural gas industry (http://www.energytomorrow.org/), that features a semi-attractive woman (who appears, however, to be somewhat of a zombie) who touts the virtues of the industries of which she is a spokesperson. She discusses the fact that we are on the way to energy independence, refers to the fact that the energy industry is an extremely important employer, and declares that we USans have a bright energy future.

At no time, however, does she refer to problems associated with extraction efforts (e.g., pollution of ground water, ruining the esthetics of the landscape), nor does she ever mention the facts that:

- The reason for the occurrence of global warming is our burning of fossil fuels (including the ones for which she is a spokesperson).

- The probability is extremely high that the "tipping point," relative to climate change, will be reached, and then crossed, within a matter of decades (if not sooner).

- When that occurs, conditions will become increasingly chaotic, with societies collapsing, and with much of the world's population being wiped out.

Bright future, indeed!

I assume that this woman is saying what she is saying because she is being *paid* to do so—and doesn't have a clue relative to the subject matter regarding which she is speaking. That is, it's likely that she doesn't realize that everything she says (reads, most likely!) is pure propaganda, and rather than being helpful is likely convincing a significant number of viewers that our "energy problem" is something other than the fact that our energy usage—given its dependence on fossil fuels—while helping provide us with a "high" standard of living, is at the same time undermining, from a long-run standpoint, not only our standard of living, but the very basis of our existence.

If this woman knew this, would she quit her job with this organization? Or is she paid so much for performing this "service" that she can't "afford" to do so?

Only she knows the answer to this question, but I would hope that she would educate herself about global warming, so that she would begin to realize the tremendous disservice being performed by the organization that is employing her. Perhaps then she would quit her job, and then become an important spokesperson for "the other side." Because she has become so

familiar with the public, as a result of her constant presence on television here in the "states," she could become an effective educator for "the other side."

Although I hope that this will happen, I frankly do not expect it to occur—which fact bothers me greatly, for as a partial result of her efforts, many in our society are, and will remain, ignorant as to the threat posed to our species by global warming. The erratic weather that we have been experiencing the past few years (and phenomena related to global warming, such as the wild fires that have been constantly in the news recently) may cause some people to question what this woman has been saying. But without being presented with strong counter-claims, the question arises:

> Who are you going to believe? Me, or your lying eyes?

as Marx said—Groucho, not Karl!

What's needed today is strongly-stated counter-claims—repeated frequently. However, the likelihood of that occurring is rather slim. As a consequence, those who (a) *are* aware of the dangers posed by global warming, (b) recognize that it is now too late to halt the further "progress" of global warming, and (c) also realize, therefore, that only adaptive efforts will give us an opportunity to survive the ravages of global warming, must (a) begin engaging in such efforts and (b) encourage others to do so as well.

What the Frack!

Alton C. Thompson

The controversial practice of "fracking"—short for "hydraulic fracturing"—that has been in the news recently has been thought of as a potential problem primarily because of its *water* impacts: On the one hand, the process *uses* water, and can *deplete* the water supply in areas lacking in water; on the other hand, the *process itself* can result in the *contamination* of local water sources.

Although fracking is not usually thought of as a cause of global warming—the burning of its *products*, rather, have been identified as culprits—the fact of the matter is that fracking *does* have potential for "contributing" to global warming—and in at least two ways:

An ex-Mobil Corporation Vice President recently stated:

> 20, 30, 100 years down the road we don't know how much methane is going to be making its way up [through fissures in the rock created as a result of fracking]. And if you do hundreds of thousands of wells, there's a good chance you're going to have a lot of methane coming up, exacerbating global warming . . . . That is what Tony Ingraffea is talking about as part of the problem. [Anthony Ingraffea, Dwight C. Baum professor of engineering at Cornell University, in 2011 co-authored a landmark study on the greenhouse-gas footprint of high-volume fracking.]

That is, fracking results in the fracturing of rock layers, and the fissures thereby created can act as conduits for methane escaping into the atmosphere—methane, in gaseous form, being far more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide (CO_2).

He added that:

> What you [also] don't know [is that] when you plug that well, how much is going to find its way to the surface without going up the well bore. And there are lots of good indications that plugging the well doesn't really work long-term. . . . there is at least one study showing that 100 percent of plugs installed in abandoned wells fail within 100 years and many of them much sooner.

In other words, once the fracking operation has been completed in an area, and the wells have been plugged, that plugging does not result in a cessation of the problem—because of failures, occurring virtually inevitably, associated with the plugging "down the road."

It's bad enough that the products of oil and gas drilling, when used (i.e., when burned in automobiles, furnaces, etc.), produce greenhouse gases, and thereby "contribute" to global warming. As sources from which oil and gas can be extracted with relative ease have become scarcer and scarcer, so that (a) sources in other locations have been sought (e.g., the Arctic) and (b) new extraction procedures have been developed (e.g., fracking), and are now being

implemented, the new practices *themselves* have become a cause of concern—for a variety of reasons, including global warming.

We seem to be on a course where we are simultaneously digging a grave for our species and then filling it in; engaging in such a "performance" would seem to be impossible, but we are managing to do it nonetheless!

The oil and gas drilling that occurred until fairly recently was regarded by virtually no one as an act of insanity—for the resulting products played a vital role in our (allegedly) "high" standard of living. With, however, the growing knowledge that (a) the burning of fossil fuels "contributes" to the greenhouse effect, (b) the global mean has already increase by 0.8º C. since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (i.e., c1750 CE), (c) an increase of 2º C. is regarded by most climate scientists as the "safe" upper limit that should not be crossed, and (d) the "climate commitment" value is thought to be between 1º C. and 1.5º/1.6º C., it is clear that:

- Fracking simply *exacerbates* the global warming problem—when, if anything, we should be attempting to do the opposite.

- The occurrence of fracking serves to help bring ever closer that point in time when the "tipping point" is reached, and crossed—resulting in (a) accelerated increase in the global mean, (b) an increase in storminess, (c) an increase in the number (and thus frequency) of severe storms, and (d) increasingly erratic weather conditions. And as these changes occur, drought, flooding, wildfires, disease, and violence are likely to increasingly become problems.

What's clear is that we have reached a point where one can say with confidence that we must be insane—because our behavior can be interpreted in no other way!

In fact, to say (as I did above, in the second point) that we humans will increasingly experience problems related to global warming is so much of an *under*statement that it is a *virtual lie*: Climate scientists such as Britain's Kevin Anderson have stated their expectation that global warming, in its manifold manifestations (as mentioned above), is likely to wipe out most of the world's population before the end of this century! Thus, it should be clear that no other problem that we face currently is as serious as that of global warming!

What the latter (very strong) possibility suggests—and given the seeming blindness of our leaders, corporate and political, as to the seriousness of the threat posed by global warming— is that if one is to have any chance at all of surviving the chaos that lies in our future, we need to start *now* to engage in adaptive activities—acting as individuals, and as individuals working with like-minded others. See, e.g., my "A Communities Program," for a fairly lengthy presentation of my ideas on the matter.

Peacefulness, Cooperation, and Biology

Alton C. Thompson

Bruce D. Bonta and Douglas P. Fry, in their "Lessons for the Rest of Us: Learning From Peaceful Societies," [1] state (p. 178) "Overall, the nomadic egalitarian type of hunter-gatherer social organization tends to be relatively peaceful compared to more complex forms of social organization . . . ." They then added that "there are many ways to create and maintain peace [2], and different societies adopt different approaches, some more effectively than others."

The Wikipedia article on Fry (cited above) states, of Fry, that:

> Drawing on archeology and fieldwork on hunter-gatherer bands [2] from around the world, Fry debunks the idea that war and conflict is ancient and inevitable and that there is an inborn instinct of aggression in humans. Fry shows that, far from being natural, warfare actually appeared quite recently along with changes in social organization and especially the rise of states. Strong anthropological finding, which has been replicated over different studies, is that there is a correlation between increasing social complexity and the likelihood of war. What this means is the simplest type of society, nomadic hunter gatherer bands, tend to be relatively unwarlike and as social complexity increases into kingdoms and chiefdoms, the chance of warfare definitely increases

Note here that the Bonta-Fry passage seemingly suggests that gatherer-hunter societies are peaceful because their members have *learned* to be, and that adults in such groups have *taught* the young such behavior. The Wikipedia statement about Fry, however, in referring to Fry's debunking of the claim of an "inborn instinct of aggression" in humans seems to hint that a *variety* of factors explain the tendency of peacefulness with gatherer-hunter groups—including the possibility that there is an inborn instinct of *peacefulness*.

I am not familiar enough with Fry's work to know where he stands on this issue, but if Irven DeVore is correct in arguing that "Males are a vast breeding experiment run by females," [3] and gatherer-hunter peoples tended, and tend, to be peaceful, the suggestion is that (a) sexual selection—technically, epigamic selection—may have played an important role in the evolution of humans in that (b) in the early phase of human evolution (when all humans were gatherer-hunters) females selected those males for mating purposes who exhibited a tendency to provide them with meat (and perhaps some gathered foods), who offered protection to them when predators represented a threat, etc.

Why might the above facts have relevance in explaining—or at least *helping* to explain—peacefulness with gatherer-hunters? The behavior exhibited by the males referred to above can be interpreted as *cooperative* behavior—cooperative behavior being multi-dimensional in what it

involves, but *one* aspect of cooperative behavior being acting *peacefully* with reference to other human beings.

Given that Nowak's book (referenced in endnote 3) has been in my library for the past 25 years, I thought that I would read (today, being Sunday) what she had to say about epigamic selection as it might be related to cooperative behavior, but found her discussion most disappointing:

- The only reference that I could find to cooperative behavior occurred toward the middle of the book (p. 115), where she stated: "Very likely the hazards of hunting made cooperative skills an evolutionary mandate." Not only does this not refer to cooperative behavior by males *apart* from any reference to epigamic selection; her use of the term "evolutionary mandate" provides one with absolutely no insight into *how* cooperative hunting might come onto the scene: It is simply a glib statement!

- Because humans *do* have decision-making capability, it is entirely plausible to refer to "female choice" in the case of humans. In fact, relative to this she stated (p. 59) that: "The human female . . . seems to choose her husband with an eye to his ability to provide for the children." However, she fails to make a distinction between that epigamic selection that occurs (a) with species capable of conscious choice-making and (b) such "selection" with species *lacking* such capability.

- For example, between pp. 48 – 62 she uses, with reference to species in the second category, the following terms (primarily with reference to females), each of which suggests, to some degree, a capability to make choices (listed in alphabetical order):

  - Accept
  - Attracted
  - Bluff
  - Choice/choose
  - Comparison shopping (!)
  - Concerned with
  - Consideration
  - Comparison
  - Coyness
  - Criterion
  - Discriminating
  - Ensure
  - Fussy
  - Gives a hoot
  - Her dish
  - Importance to

- Looks to
- Minds of their own
- Prefer
- Pretend
- Selecting
- Wants

I know that it is easy to personify that which should not be personified—this often being done to make one's presentation less "dry," easier to relate to. The problem with doing so, however, is that it leads to sloppy thinking. In Nowak's case, for example, it leads to an utter absence of any discussion—speculative or otherwise—as to *why* epigamic selection developed with "lower" species. On p. 60 she refers to "[Robert L.] Trivers' theory of parental investment . . . ," but that's *not* a **theory**, Ms. Nowak, it is merely an *ex post facto* **observation**. And in discussing guppies, she asserts (p. 55) that "there is method in the female guppy's madness. By choosing a rare male, she ensures that her offspring will enjoy a maximum amount of genetic diversity." Ms. Nowak, can't you see that this is an *effect*, rather than a *cause*?!

I don't know how typical Ms. Nowak is of biologists, but when one reads about, e.g., "*kin selection*" elsewhere and are informed that biologists regard this as an *explanation* rather than (what it is actually) a mere *description*, one has to wonder if the discipline has any members educated in the nature of science and scientific explanation. To say that "evolution created" (Nowak, p. 50) something or that certain behavior is "programmed" (Nowak, p. 51) is to be anything *but* enlightening! More accurately, it is to be merely *glib*.

In looking in Nowak's book I was hoping to find some support for the thesis that epigamic selection has played some role in the development of cooperative (including peaceful) behavior with humans, but was disappointed, to say the least!

Endnotes

1. Chapter 7 in *The Psychology of Resolving Global Conflicts. From War to Peace. Volume 1: Nature vs. Nurture*, edited by Mari Fitzduff and Chris E. Stout. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2005. Dr. Fry kindly supplied me with a copy of this chapter.

2. Some scientists (e.g., Richard E. F. Leakey) prefer "gatherer-hunter" to "hunter-gatherer" because with most foraging groups most of the food consumed is (and has been) acquired via gathering rather than hunting. Given this, and that gathering has typically been done by female adults, hunting by male adults, "hunter-gatherer" is a chauvinistic term!

3. Quoted (p. 52) in Mariette Nowak, *Eve's Rib: A Revolutionary New View of Female Sex Roles*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980. Ms. Nowak is a neighbor of mine, although I have never met her.

The Bible and Me

Alton C. Thompson

The Christian (Protestant) Bible has always been a part of my life. As far back as I can remember, certain passages in the Bible have resonated with me. At some point it occurred to me that the passages that did so expressed—either directly or indirectly (e.g., via parables)—*values* to which I could give my assent. The reason for *that*, I learned much later, is that we are "born to be good"—a matter dealt with well by Gary Olson in his "Neuroscience and Moral Politics: [Noam] Chomsky's Intellectual Progeny."

The Bible literature to which I was initially exposed—other than the Bible itself—consisted of stories based on the Bible (while a child) and (later) literature of a devotional nature. Since my youth, however, I have been exposed—primarily via self-exposure—to a variety of other Bible-related works, so that my present perspective on the Bible:

- Is such that I have little interest in the matter of whether events (including speeches) "reported" in the Bible actually occurred.

- Therefore precludes its identification as "Scripture," on my part.

What those two facts mean is that I have "come a long way" in how I perceive the Bible, and a question that arises here is: What events changed the trajectory of my relationship to the Bible?

My best recollection is that change began to occur only after I was in my early 30s—my adult time prior to then being too occupied with gaining an education and beginning the process of working for a living. In the early 1970s, however, I attended a summer program on urban issues at Ohio State University, and one of the speakers—a sociologist—made reference to *Sociological Study of the Bible* (1912), by Louis Wallis (1876 - ?).[1]

Although I found what this scholar had to say about the Bible of interest, I have no recollection *now* of what he said about the Bible, viewed sociologically; but what his presentation *did* do for me was to alert me to the fact that scholarly literature existed "out there" that examined that book from a critical standpoint.

It wasn't until 1975, though, that—while in a used-book store in Cincinnati—I stumbled upon an old (1915) book by a professor of "practical theology" (!) named Theodore Gerald Soares—*The Social Institutions and Ideals of the Bible*—and purchased the book. In reading this book, what impressed me was the *attitudes*—both explicit and implicit—expressed by Soares. For example (pp. 371 – 72):

> The words and deeds of Jesus and of the prophets give us very little to obey. But is obedience the prime need of a free spirit? They give us little to copy in slavish imitation. But is the mechanical reproduction of the acts of another the best means for the development of vigorous personality? We are not in need of directions but of inspiration. If we ever get the right motives, our own intelligence will determine the most valuable methods.

Implicit in this passage is that a Tradition was established millennia ago, and that the point today is not so much to *learn* about that Tradition but to *continue* it. How different, I thought to myself, was the attitude of the clergy to whom I had been exposed—who were content *to read* to congregants passages from the Bible, and then *comment* upon them, but who seemingly could not grasp the concept that they should be striving to *be* like Elijah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah, etc., not just *talk* about them! That is, they needed to conceive of themselves as a *part* of a Tradition, not just *observers* and *commenters* on it.

Once I had arrived at the conclusion that it was a certain *Tradition* that was important, rather than the Bible *per se*, [2] this helped me discover why I had, since college days, been attracted to Thorstein Veblen [1857 – 1929]—besides the fact that, like me, he was a Wisconsin-born person with a Norwegian heritage: The notion of a Tradition is implicit in Veblen's works, a point that I suggest (if but implicitly) on pp. 41 – 46 of the eBook referenced in endnote 2.

Having been "converted" to the view that a Tradition has been in existence for millennia, with some information given about it in the Bible, but with that Tradition extending down to the present, three questions occurred to me:

- *Why* did the Tradition become established (and when)?

- *How* did it develop over time?

- How should it be continued *now*?

The first and third of these three questions have been of especial interest to me, and in Chapter 2 of my *What Are Churches* For*?* (see endnote 2) I refer to the "discrepancy" concept introduced by sociobiologist [David P. Barash]. Briefly, what this concept "says" is that when the way of life for humans changed from one based on gathering and hunting to agriculture, they were exposed to new stimuli, they changed their behaviors, and they used their brains differently—and these changes represented a *discrepancy*. A discrepancy in the sense that they had become "designed," biologically, for a gatherer-hunter way of life, so that a *change* in that way of life was discrepant so far as their "design specifications" were concerned.

In chapters 3 and 4 I discuss various perspectives on the meaning of "design specifications" (for objective truths do not exist on the matter), and earlier I had made the claim that this discrepancy had several different consequences millennia ago, and continues to do so. The consequence of particular relevance for the present essay, however, is that (I contend) it led to the emergence of

a number of prophets in Palestine, and it is to those prophets that Judaism owes its existence, with Christianity later stemming, to a degree at least, from Judaism.

What motivated the ancient Hebrew prophets was the development of not simply an *inegalitarian* situation, but one in which some were *oppressing* others. That is, the "general welfare" was the primary concern of those individuals, and their *direct* concern was the elimination of what we would today call injustice.

Today, the existence of injustice is still of concern, but the concept of "design specifications" encompasses much more than that, having a *biological* basis—a basis not possible of being understood by the ancient prophets. The *modern* "prophet," has an additional concern, however, *beyond* the fact that so many—*all* of us, actually!—have lives that deviate substantially from one in accord with our "design specifications" as humans. A way of life that, therefore, might very well be termed "unnatural."

That additional concern is *global warming*—a collection of phenomena that has already extinguished many species, and will render extinct many more—with the possibility that *our* species will be among them. Given that it is now too late to halt further warming, our only choice now is to try to adapt to the ravages that global warming will *most certainly* be inflicting on us humans within a matter of decades.

To be a "Bible person" today is to (a) recognize that many of the "characters" in that book were in the Tradition to varying degrees, (b) recognize that they, too, must become a *part* of that Tradition, and (c) then *engage*, insofar as one is able, in those Tradition activities for which one is best qualified.

My hope is that many will become a part of the Tradition—and soon! The beauty here is that this Tradition is not just for those raised in Christianity, but for *anyone*—regardless of religious background, including none!

Endnotes

1. It's possible, however, that his reference was to *God and the Social Process* (1935) by Wallis—my memory is somewhat hazy on this matter.

2. In the Introduction I discuss the Tradition, and then devote the first chapter of my *What Are Churches For?* to my summary of the Tradition as expressed in the Bible.

Who Would've Thunk It!

Alton C. Thompson

Here I've been arguing, over the past few months, that our society is in danger of collapsing as a result of the various phenomena associated with "global warming." But evidence is piling up to the effect that collapse may occur *soon*—and as the result of self-inflicted wounds having a different source. Consider this:

> while Speaker [of the House of Representatives John] Boehner may be content with being at the helm of the worst Congress in history, and with the fact that surveys show more Americans prefer lice and colonoscopies over their elected lawmakers in Washington [!], the results, or lack thereof, speak for themselves.

Thom Hartmann adds:

> Instead of working to pass the legislation that this nation desperately needs to get back on its feet and to rebuild its economy, Boehner would rather see our great nation end up like the now bankrupt Detroit. And boy is Boehner's wish coming true.

I disagree with Hartmann that our primary concern today should be rebuilding our economy—for that is an extremely short-sighted view that ignores the threat to our continued existence posed by global warming. I do, however, agree with Hartmann that our Congress—which has been both a "do-nothing" Congress, as well as a "do-the-wrong-thing" Congress!—has seemingly been guided by self-destructive tendencies. What I would add to his commentary, however, is that our society may very well be the first "advanced" society in modern history to *collapse*—and for reasons other than global warming!

I have read that shortly after the last national election some of the key Republican leaders in Congress got together and made a pact to do as little as possible—presumably in an effort to make Pres. O'Bomber look as bad as possible. What they overlooked is that he didn't need them to look bad—as his goal seems to be an even worse president than George W. Bush. That doesn't seem possible, but O'Bomber seems to be striving to achieve that goal!

The difference between Congress and O'Bomber is that the former is *deliberately* trying to ruin our economy whereas—as Robert J. Burrowes has argued in an essay on this site—*psychological* factors seem to be playing a major role in O'Bomber's decision-making. As to our Supreme Court—which is dominated by right-wing individuals—*their* decision-making seems to be guided by the *ideology* that "possesses" them.

What a government our society has at present!

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- A Congress determined to *blind* themselves to our society's problems, and do virtually nothing to address those problems.

- A President whose decision-making stems from psychological problems that he is able to hide from most—except people like the perceptive Bob Burrowes.

- A Supreme Court so blinded by the ideology that "possesses" the majority of its members that they simply can't recognize the problems that face us currently—and in the future—and, therefore, have been acting to *exacerbate* the problems that exist.

What did we do to deserve this mess?!

My answer is: Nothing!

The explanation that I prefer is one having its basis in this statement summarizing the thinking of Douglas P. Fry: "as social complexity increases into kingdoms and chiefdoms, the chance of warfare definitely increases."

Granted that Fry's concern is with war and peace, but his point that a society with a high level of "social complexity" has a high probability of being warlike (which fits the United States perfectly!—unfortunately) also has relevance, I believe, for *other* problems as well.

It can be argued, I believe, that as a society increases in size, and (thereby) also in complexity, it tends to become more inegalitarian. This tendency does not, however, *just* have an economic dimension. It also has implications for the society's "governing," defined broadly.

What I mean here as that as a society becomes more complex, and develops a hierarchy of social classes, some of those in the society's "upper reaches" are not merely content to use their riches for the purpose of "conspicuous display" (to use a famous term favored by Thorstein Veblen). Some decide to use their wealth to (a) fund campaigns, so that "their people" get in office, (b) hire lobbyists to get politicians to do their bidding, and (c) "manufacture consent."

All three of these actions are dastardly, but the third—in being of an insidious nature—is especially odious. A society within which virtually all adults have the legal right to vote, but in which the public is subjected to propaganda that serves the interests of the elite, is a society within which mass enfranchisement is an unfunny joke.

It may not be *inevitable* that a complex society develops a government such as we have currently in the United States. It could, however, be argued (which I will not do here, though) that our society has, and has had, characteristics which, as the society became increasingly complex, virtually *guaranteed* that at some point we would have the governmental situation that we now have.

If our current (dismal) situation has any "saving grace," it may lie in the fact that if an eco-communitarian movement were to get underway soon (having as its rationale that it would represent an effort to adapt to the global warming that will be occurring "down the road"), it might be rather successful. That is, it might be able to attract a large number of participants—on the one hand, those "in the know" about global warming," and, on the other hand, those currently hurting because of the sad current state of our economy, being made increasingly worse by our governmental "leaders."

For that reason I do not have sleepless nights thinking about what a mess our society is in at present. There *is*, I believe, reason to see some light in the darkness that is beginning to envelop us.

A Strange New Study

Alton C. Thompson

A new study, by Gail Whiteman, Chris Hope, and Peter Wadhams, and published in *Nature*, suggests, but does not emphasize, (a) that a tipping point, in climate change, may be reached sooner than anticipated, (b) with drastic changes then occurring. The authors of the study are, respectively, a professor of sustainability, management and climate change; a reader in policy modeling; and a professor of ocean physics.

The focus of the authors is on warming in the Arctic, and their emphasis is on the fact that what "is missing from the equation is a worldwide perspective on Arctic change. Economic modelling of the resulting impacts on the world's climate, in particular, has been scant." As an illustration of their emphasis on economic impacts, the authors claim that "The release of methane from thawing permafrost beneath the East Siberian Sea, off northern Russia, alone comes with an average global price tag of $60 trillion in the absence of mitigating action . . . ."

The authors note that a

> 50-gigatonne (Gt) reservoir of methane, stored in the form of hydrates, exists on the East Siberian Arctic Shelf. It is likely to be emitted as the seabed warms, either steadily over 50 years or suddenly. Higher methane concentrations in the atmosphere will accelerate global warming and hasten local changes in the Arctic, speeding up sea-ice retreat, reducing the reflection of solar energy and accelerating the melting of the Greenland ice sheet. The ramifications will be felt far from the poles.

Two points are of especial interest in the above passage:

- The huge amount of methane present in the Arctic—this fact of importance given that methane is far more potent as a greenhouse gas than is carbon dioxide (CO_2).

- The possibility that methane *could* be released into the atmosphere in a sudden burst.

Although the authors make no *direct* reference to a tipping point, the facts that (a) an increase in the global mean of 0.8° C. has already occurred (since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution), (b) the "climate commitment" value is somewhere between 1° C. and 1.5°/1.6° C., and (c) the consensus with climate scientists is that a "safe" increase in the global mean is about 2° C. (after which change will be rapid), it follows that *even if no methane is released into the atmosphere in the future, at some point within the next few decades the tipping point will be reached and crossed.*

The authors assert that the "The WEF [World Economic Forum] should . . . encourage innovative adaptation and mitigation plans." And although I agree that "innovative adaption" plans should be developed (and not just by WEF), I am puzzled by the fact that the authors don't realize the *inevitability* of a tipping point being crossed, so that any "mitigation plans" would, of necessity, be doomed to failure.

What's doubly puzzling is that the authors fail to realize that the release of methane in the Arctic—which appears to be inevitable—will push the *time* when a tipping point is reached and crossed *ever sooner*. Also, if methane is released in a *sudden burst* (a possibility that they raise), change will be *extremely* rapid—more rapid than if it were to be released slowly—making adaptation to the changes that occur extremely difficult. Thus, the dangers represented by this methane are that:

- Its release will bring the tipping point ever closer to the present.

- If it is released as a burst, change will proceed at an exceedingly rapid pace, increasing the difficulty of adapting to the changes.

The strangeness of this study is not confined, however, to the authors' failure to recognize that reaching, and then crossing, a tipping point is inevitable, and a future release of Arctic methane would move that tipping point closer, with a burst accelerating change. The *narrowness* of the authors' thinking—revealed by their focus on *economic* effects—is truly appalling.

Implicit in their discussion is the assumption that the *structure* of societies will be little affected by global warming—so that it is meaningful to refer to an annual price tag, globally, of $60 trillion. What they fail to recognize in making that ridiculous statement is that global warming is likely to wipe out most of the world's population before the end of this century, so that the question arises: Who will be paying this amount for the damages caused by global warming?!

If the authors were to think about the effects of global warming using whatever "common sense" they have, rather than their academic backgrounds, they would realize that:

- Given the various "dimensions" of global warming—an increase in the global mean temperature, an increase in the number of storms, an increase in the severity of storms, and increasingly erratic weather conditions—food production in the "open air" (as opposed to in greenhouses) will become increasingly difficult.

- With less food available, combined with a continually growing population, food will become increasingly expensive.

- A point will be reached when food will become *prohibitively* expensive for more and more people—an important point, given that most people *purchase* their food, rather than produce their own.

- As a consequence, more and more people will starve, become ill (and then starve); and because violence will become more common—driven by desperation—more and more people will be dying as a result of violence.

- These developments, as they make "normal" living ever more a thing of the past, will eventuate in societal collapse all over the globe—resulting in an intensification of hunger, starvation, disease, and violence, until perhaps 90% of the world's population (a figure mentioned by British climate scientist [Kevin Anderson](#)) will be wiped out.

I agree that Whiteman, Hope, and Wadhams have done us a service in making clear the danger currently existing in the Arctic—a danger that the energy industry is ignoring, so "possessed" are its leaders with a fixation on the short-run "bottom line." But by themselves ignoring "climate commitment" and the virtual certainty that a tipping point will be reached, and crossed, within a matter of decades, if not years, they demonstrate the narrowness of their thinking about what global warming entails

The narrowness of their thinking is further demonstrated by the fact that they focus on what they term the "economic" impacts of global warming; for in doing so they have artificially separated *economic* effects from *other* effects—revealing an utter lack of "common sense" on their part. For given that the major effects of global warming will be to cause starvation, disease, violence, societal collapse, etc., it is foolish beyond belief to focus—as *they* do—on *economic* effects.

The authors speak with confidence of an "average global price tag of $60 trillion," but in doing so have ignored the GIGO principle—"garbage in, garbage out."

The need today is not only for a cessation of *meaningless* research, such as that reported by Whiteman, Hope, and Wadhams, but a cessation of research *per se*. Doing more research simply wastes precious time—time that *should* be devoted to (a) *planning* adaptive measures, and then (b) *acting* on those plans.

Our Handicapped Species

Alton C. Thompson

We inherited from our ancestors physical characteristics that enabled us to have mobility, and senses that enabled us not only to *acquire* food (vision, hearing, smell) but to safeguard us from eating that which might be toxic (taste). Where we primarily differ from our ancestors is in possessing a larger brain, one capable of abstract thought. Presumably, *having* a larger brain gave our ancestors a survival advantage, so that as those individuals with larger brains survived, and produced progeny, *average* brain size increased for the species.

The development of a larger brain in conjunction with the development of certain physical characteristics enabled the development of speech, facilitating communication with others in one's group. And the *use* of speech in communication contributed to *thought* development, which got expressed in the development of *names* for the things that could be observed, the *abstracting* from those names represented in classifications, and (empirical) *knowledge* about members of a given category (both in terms of appearance and behavioral tendencies)—knowledge which further contributed to the survival of a group's members.

Although most of the knowledge acquired was of the *immediate* surround—it being essential to have such knowledge, given its survival benefits—certain elements of the *non*-immediate surround could, in fact, be observed (such as the sun, moon, clouds, lightning), and these observable, but non-immediate, phenomena became the basis for *speculation*, speculative *stories*, "religious" *ideas*, and then "religious" *practices*.

Our *ways of life* today differ greatly from our gatherer-hunter ancestors, but our *physical* characteristics have remained basically unchanged. Given this, our senses, e.g., serve different *purposes* than they did for our ancestors: Whereas vision, hearing, and smell once were useful for obtaining food, today they are used especially to help us navigate our environment accurately and safely—getting us to and from work, to and from stores and professional offices, etc. Taste continues to guide our likes and dislikes in eating—but, unfortunately, is unable to detect potentially dangerous additives (defined broadly, to include insecticides, pesticides, etc.) to our foods.

Whereas for our ancestors one's mind was absorbed especially in one's immediate surround, today that is only *partially* the case. It *is* the case when we are "out and about" (going to the workplace, stores, etc.), but once we have reached our destination our surround is rarely a natural one (except while vacationing). Rather, it consists of various human-made physical items (such as desks, telephones, computers) while at work, products for sale and shopping carts (while at a supermarket), and a great variety of things (in our homes, etc.).

The *peculiar* thing about modern life, however, is that although during much of one's daily life one's *immediate surround* consists of various human-made things, our *minds* tend not to be *focused* on those things. Rather, except, e.g., for those occasions when one is in a store *looking* for certain things (to purchase), our minds tend to occupy an intellectual realm far removed from our surroundings. If we happen to be at work, that intellectual realm pertains to the nature of our work (and to a lesser degree to our relationships with fellow employees). If we are at home, we are engaged in conversations with other family members, engaged in various chores (such as preparing meals, mowing the lawn), watching television, etc.

For our ancestors, the immediate physical and human surroundings were the center of their lives (with the exceptions noted above). For us, however, surroundings—physical ones in particular—tend to be merely a *setting*, so that although we may be physically *occupying* a given setting, our *minds* are often elsewhere.

In principle, this latter fact should be advantageous to us, for insofar as our capability for abstract thought enables us to peer far into the future, it enables us to recognize not only that *global warming* is in its early stages, but to anticipate rapid change in the future—such rapid change that life will become *difficult* for all, and literally *impossible* for many. Yet most of us still retain much of our "primitive" mindset, and are therefore unwilling to think very far ahead.

We can plan what we will do tomorrow; we can plan on a career, and then engage in those activities that will prepare us for that career; we can plan where we will vacation next summer, etc. But although we *can* look *somewhat* into the future, and make plans for what we will be doing in the future, we tend to make a fatal assumption, so far as global warming is concerned.

That assumption is that the *way of life* that we have now will continue into the future, with only incremental changes—changes that are of such a slight nature, and occur so infrequently, that we will be able to *adjust* to them fairly readily. This tacit assumption—along with the fact that we all tend to *resist* change—has the consequence that although we may recognize, *intellectually*, that change, in the future, may be both rapid and drastic, the "conservative" forces operating on us tend to make us not take seriously what we "know" about the future.

Many in our society are not, of course, involved in this "combat," for they lack awareness of the dangers posed by global warming: They confine their reading to the mass media which (in being supported by advertisers who may not even *believe in* global warming!), fail to inform them about global warming; and they spend a great deal of their time in front of the "boob tube" (i.e., television set), and are not only not *informed* for the same reason, but are actually *misinformed* by advertisements paid for by the energy companies.

But neither those who *are* informed about global warming nor those *not* so informed (including the *mis*informed) will be *able* to escape the ravages that global warming will be inflicting on us in the near future—has *already* so begun! *Tha*t is an undeniable fact!

Unfortunately, however, we are *handicapped* in responding to this problem, in part because although *some* of us are aware of the threat, *all* of us have become "designed," via the operation of evolutionary factors, to desire *stability* over *change*: Some of us *know* that we should change our lives, but *resist* doing so. We may have "good" reasons for doing so—e.g., we don't know the best *direction* for change; or know this, but lack the *resources* for changing, or are for other reasons held back. But too often our "good" reasons are not reasons at all but, rather, are mere *excuses*.

The vast majority, though, are handicapped in an even *more* serious manner, in that they are not even *aware* of the dangers that lie ahead, so that insofar as their minds are troubled, it is with other—often trivial—matters, such as whether [Ryan Braun](#) will be playing baseball next year.

The "question of the hour" is whether enough individuals will overcome their handicaps so that they will be able to *recognize* that they must engage in *adaptive measures* if they are to have any hope of surviving, and then *plan*, and *ac*t upon, those plans—thereby increasing the probability that they, and their children, will survive the chaos that the future will be bringing to us, "free of charge"!

What's of particular importance is that our *leaders*—in government and in the economic realm— come to such a realization; for it is such people who especially have the ability to effectuate a meaningful response to the problem of global warming. Unfortunately, however, most of those in that category—living, as they do, a life of comfort—are so *attached* to their way of life that it *incapacitates* them from *consciously* recognizing that global warming will *force* them to change their way of life, the likely consequence of this being that they will not *exercise* the abilities that they possess.

This fact will prove not only unfortunate for *them*, but for our s*pecies*! Although I am reasonably confident that *some* will survive the ravages of global warming, I am convinced that many *more* would if our leaders would do what they are capable of doing. However, the *prospects* of this occurring do not appear to be very bright.

Community "Talking Points"

Alton C. Thompson

XCIX

Ah, Love! could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

The Rubáiyat of Omar Khayyám

Today, there is no *need* to "shatter it to bits"—for it—the. existing "sorry Scheme of Things" is now "on the road" to doing so—but not because of *external* forces operating on it. Rather, it is in the process of "shattering"—with some signs of that shattering *already* evident—because of our "pouring" greenhouse gases such as CO_2 into the atmosphere. Not *literal* "pouring," of course, but, rather, the burning of fossil fuels, which has resulted in the release of such gases into the atmosphere—thereby resulting in what is commonly referred to as "global warming" (but which I referred to as Trendular Atmospheric Depatterization, or TAD, in one of my previous essays!)

As is commonly known, "global warming" is somewhat of a misnomer, for an increasing "greenhouse effect" has not only resulted in (a) an increase in the global mean temperature (about 0.8º C. since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, c1750 CE), but will result in (b) an increase in the *number* of storms, (c) an increase in their *severity*, and will result in (d) increasingly *erratic* weather conditions—so that the very concept of "climate" will, at some point, become meaningless. That is (referring to this latter fact), increasingly is the word "climate" coming to lack a *referent*; increasingly is it coming to refer—like "unicorn"—to a phenomenon that *doesn't exist.*

What has particular *human* relevance, however, is that a "tipping point" is likely to be reached, and crossed, within a few decades—after which "runaway climate change" is likely to begin. That is, because of (a) the increase in the global mean that has already occurred, (b) the "climate commitment" *currently* (whose value is believed to be between 1º C. and 1.5º C.), (c) the consensus with climate scientists that an increase of 2º C. would be sufficient to result in reaching, and then crossing, the "tipping point," combined with the fact that (d) there are no signs of a significant "letting up," so far as the emission of greenhouse gases is concerned; what these various facts together mean is that it's seemingly *inevitable* that we will be in a state of "runaway" within a few decades, if not sooner.

If we humans had the intelligence that we so often attribute to ourselves, we would be planning *now* to meet this crisis "head on," and then would *act* on those plans. The fact that runaway is in our future suggests, of course, that our thoughts now *should* be directed toward how we might be able to *adapt* to the changes in atmospheric conditions that are already noticeable, but will become increasingly severe. In a number of my previous essays on this site I have argued that adaptation could take two forms—homesteading and the creation of small, largely self-sufficient eco-communities—with my preference, however, being for the latter option (because it would enable us to retain some semblance of a "civilized" existence).

In my "A Communities Program: Some Tentative Ideas" I presented many of my ideas regarding how such a program should proceed, but because of the tremendous importance that I attach to that subject, in the current essay I address the same topic, but from a slightly different perspective.

The assumption underlying my current essay is that for an eco-community to have the highest probability of success (in terms of longevity), it is essential that those individuals planning a given eco-community (for *themselves*, I assume) be in substantial agreement about a wide variety of issues before they commit themselves to the process of community-building.

Presumably, those who would get together to discuss the possibility of their creating an eco-community for themselves would *already* agree on many matters. But before actual planning begins, I believe it essential for those contemplating the possibility of creating an eco-community with a group of like-minded others to *thoroughly discuss*, among themselves, the wide range of issues related to the contemplated community—so that only those in *substantial* agreement on those issues will proceed with the effort, with the others perhaps deciding to create *their own* community (or communities), or . . . .

I assume that the initial group here would consist of about 12 – 15 adults—because a *smaller* number would be insufficient for creating a viable community, and a *larger* number would make the decision-making process difficult. But although an *initial* eco-community would be rather small, it does not follow from that fact that it would necessarily *remain* small. The community, once established, would on the one hand promote the idea of small families, so that the community would not grow rapidly—the basis for this "rule" being that we live on a finite earth, so that having a large family is irresponsible.

On the other hand, however, the community would establish *entrance requirements* for the community, and would allow new members in *only* to a certain point, that point decided upon by the community's current members—but probably no more than about 500 people total. (See Kirkpatrick Sale's *Human Scale*, a huge book that discusses the virtues of smallness!)

How this initial group would come together in the first place, and *where* they would meet are matters that I will not address here—my interest being, rather, in *what* they should discuss.

Given that, below I present a series of headings, and under each either make some suggestions, some comments, or both.

Note that these should be regarded as "talking points" rather than *directives* (insofar as I merely offer suggestions and comments here).

Let us proceed, then:

Acquisition of Land

The building of an eco-community would require land, and at a *macro* scale the primary considerations should be locating (a) the community in an area least likely to be affected by global warming (e.g., away from ocean shores—because of expected rising sea level) and (b) away from major urban areas (for protection against desperate people, once the effects of global warming become serious). Such locations would have the additional advantage of being less costly than sites closer to major urban areas. I recognize that I am biased here, but I believe that the state that I live in—Wisconsin—offers an abundance of such sites.

At a *micro* level a somewhat hilly area would be preferable, for it might provide sites suitable for the creation of earth-sheltered structures. As the orientation of such structures should be toward the sun (to enable the use of passive and/or active solar heating), the existence of sites with such an exposure on the property would be desirable.

Ownership Matters

I assume it as desirable that the community's real property—i.e., the land, along with the structures built on it—be owned by the community. How this would be determined *operationally* would be up to those creating, and then living in, the community. The rationale for such ownership is that it would enable a community to maintain its integrity as an eco-community over time.

Building Materials

So far as is possible, the materials used in building structures on the site that is purchased should be locally-derived.

Financing the Community's Creation

The details for doing this would need to be worked out by a community's prospective residents. My hope here is that financial assistance for doing this would be sought, and obtained, from foundations and/or rich individuals.

The Community's Economy

The basic activities that occur in an eco-community—i.e., those undertaken for sustenance purposes—should be community-owned and –directed (with the directors of a given activity being chosen by the community's residents). The goal of the community's residents should be *economic* self-sufficiency—although as an eco-communitarian *movement* proceeds, and a given eco-community acquires eco-community neighbors, it would be advisable for some specialization to occur, with its associated interchange among neighboring eco-communities.

The *degree* to which economic activities occurring in a community are community-owned, vs. individual or family-owned, should be decided by the members of a given community. Thus, it is entirely conceivable that a given eco-community would contain at least some *privately*-owned economic enterprises.

Social Institutions

The United States has a rich "intentional community" heritage (see this for a directory of current such communities), and what I envision (or at least *hope* occurs!) is a proliferation, in the near future, of specifically *eco*-communities. But not only do I envision an increase in the number of such communities; I envision the retention of the nuclear family as a social unit, but envision the multi-generational such family becoming common (again). It's true that past intentional communities at times experimented with sexual matters—from the celibacy of the Shakers to the "complex marriage" practice at the Oneida community—but I believe it advisable to "stick" with the nuclear family as we know it today, except for striving to make it multi-generational again.

Within a given eco-community I envision a high degree of equality—in all senses of that word— so that although males and females might, on the average, tend to perform different sets of tasks in a given community, adult males and females would be regarded, by their fellow community residents, as equal in *value*.

Internal Decision-Making

I foresee the Structured Interaction Group (see Chapter 8 of my *What Are Churches* For?) being used for that decision-making in a given eco-community that is community-wide in its implications (with the decision-making being made by all of a given community's adults).

Religion

See Part III of my *A Religion for Today* for a discussion of the sort of religion that I would like to see used in any given eco-community (i.e., NeWFism). However, the residents of any given eco-community would be at liberty to adopt any religion—including several, or none!—that they wished to adopt.

The Environment

I expect that the residents of any given eco-community would make a sincere effort to live "lightly." That is, they would strive to live *with*, not *against*, Nature.

Entertainment

Using Gaviotas as their model, the residents of a given community would make music an important part of their lives—and choose whatever other forms of entertainment that appealed to them—especially those that might have community-building (in a sociological sense) effects. As to "sporting" activities, those that emphasize cooperation would be preferred to those involving competition.

Departure Procedures

Because it's possible that some of those who were involved in community planning, and then building, may find that community-living is not their "cup of tea," procedures must be in place to reimburse such individuals should they decide to leave—procedures that are fair to all involved.

Other

It's certainly possible that issues will arise in addition to those listed and (briefly!) discussed above, and the prospective residents of a given community should identify, discuss, and resolve such issues—so that the number of individuals who choose to leave the community, once created, is reduced to a minimum.

Once a given community is established, and its members have its operations under control, the community may choose to attract new residents—up to an upper limit established at the very beginning. Again, the point should be made—with younger married individuals in a given community—that family size should be kept down, with 4-member (or smaller) nuclear families (so that each adult has a "replacement") as the ideal, but that if "accidents" occur, those new members will be welcomed into the community (rather than aborted—unless known deformities in a fetus make abortion advisable).

If it occurs that a given eco-community grows *significantly* beyond the desired (by its residents) size (in terms of population), whether by "natural increase" or by in-migration, a new community should be created for some of the given community's "surplus" population.

Again, the point must be emphasized that the above are merely "talking points," not directives. (After all, I am not in the position to enforce any directives anyway!)

[http://bravenewworld.in/2013/10/02/pdf-collected-essays/]

My Email to Prof. Paul Bloom

Alton C. Thompson

Prof. Paul Bloom (Paul.Bloom@Yale.edu)
Brooks and Suzanne Ragen Professor of Psychology & Cognitive Science
Yale University

Dear Prof. Bloom:

I had an opportunity to watch, yesterday (July 28, 2013), the rebroadcast of the *60 Minutes* television program that included a segment concerning the research that you, and your wife, Karen Wynn, have been engaged in with babies. As one who has followed the work Prof. Dacher Keltner to a degree, I find your research both interesting and highly important—such findings as:

- Evidence that 5-month-old babies, in being tested with puppets, are able to discriminate between helpful and hurtful behavior, and demonstrate, with a high level of probability (high 70s), a preference for helpful behavior.

- Related evidence, this time based on eye movements, that demonstrates, again with a high level of probability (evidently), that babies only 3 months old are also able to discriminate in that manner, and show a preference for helpful behavior.

- Evidence that babies may express "disapproving, disliking, maybe [even] condemning" attitudes (assuming that the term "attitude" is appropriate here) toward others who exhibit antisocial behavior. You cite an example where 81 % of the babies tested seemed to indicate that a "ball thief" is deserving of punishment.

- Evidence that we may be programmed to be biased—to "prefer others who are similar to ourselves"—so that "Adults will like others who share even really absolutely trivial similarities with them;" evidence that 87 % of babies tested "prefer those 'who harm . . . others' who are unlike them;" evidence that "We are predisposed to break the world up into different human groups based on the most subtle and seemingly irrelevant cues . . . [which] is the dark side of morality."

- Evidence that as children become older they *change* from being rather selfish to being concerned about being fair (age 8) to (by 9 or 10) becoming actually generous.

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You are quoted as stating that "there's a universal moral code that all humans share. The seeds of our understanding of justice, our understanding of right and wrong, are part of our biological nature."

This statement leads me to make two comments:

First, the television program seemed to suggest that the babies you have studied have all been ones raised in the United States—so that the enculturation that they have experienced has been unique to USan babies. Were similar studies undertaken in other cultures, it's likely that somewhat different results would be obtained. Babies studied in different cultures might, at the "starting point" (e.g., babies at 3 months), exhibit similar behaviors (for enculturation to that point would have been minimal), but as they aged, I would expect that divergence would occur.

Second, you refer to humans as "a creature . . . who evolved from natural selection . . . ." If, by "natural selection," you are referring to that concept as defined by Charles Darwin, I would disagree strongly. In Chapter 8 of my Ringing the Bell for Darwin I discuss Darwin's concept at length, but let be briefly say of the concept here that:

- The idea for the concept came from Rev. Thomas Malthus, his (merely speculative) assertion of a "law" of excess births applicable to any species.

- Darwin deduced "natural selection" from that (assumed) "law," but Darwin's deduction from that "law" was an invalid one.

- Given its origin, "natural selection" does not warrant the designation "theory;" if anything, it is but a *model*, one that "predicts" directional monotypic change, not polytypic change (i.e., what is commonly thought of as *evolution*).

- When, in the fifth edition of *The Origin of Species*, Darwin borrowed the term "survival of the fittest" from Herbert Spencer, and equated it with "natural selection," he demonstrated either that he didn't understand what Spencer meant by that term—or what *h*e meant by "natural selection"! By "fittest" Spencer was referring to fitting the *environment*; although fitting the environment is (of course!) *implicit* in Darwin's concept of "natural selection," Darwin's concept is not *basically* about that. Rather, it is about outcompeting one's conspecifics in a (supposed) "struggle for survival." If one tries to interpret "survival of the fittest" as referring to that (supposed) struggle, one is using strange, inappropriate terminology.

If, rather than attaching a *Darwinian* meaning to "natural selection," you are giving it a more *modern* meaning, as, e.g., "the gradual natural process by which biological traits become either more or less common in a population," you are using a meaning that is merely *descriptive*, and therefore basically *vacuous*—because it makes no reference to the *mechanism(s)* that is bringing

about change. If Darwin's concept of "natural selection" is one that has no relevance whatsoever for explaining human evolution, it at least had the virtue of having a definite *mechanism* associated with it (i.e., intraspecific competition).

I am in full agreement with you that we are products of "biological evolution," but is *that* not to say something rather similar to [Jean-Baptiste Poquelin's](#) (i.e., Molière's) statement (lampooning physicians) that "opium causes sleep because of its dormative qualities," or [Ring Lardner, Jr.'s](#) "explanation" (in *[The Young Immigrunts,](#)* p. 78) "Shut up he explained"?

"Biological evolution" is a *process,* one that doesn't "just happens" but, rather happens because of the operation of certain *mechanisms*. In the case of humans those mechanisms have especially been (in chronological order) environmental change (Steven Stanley), predation (Robert Sussman), and epigamic selection (often referred to as "sexual selection;" Adrienne Zihlman, Nancy Tanner). The term "biological evolution" *by itself* conveys very little information.

A final point: Not only did "natural selection" play no role whatsoever in human evolution. The *introduction* of that concept turned out to be evil, for it formed the basis of [Social Darwinism](#)— which has reared its ugly head recently in the form of [neo-liberalism](#).

You may not regard these comments relative to "natural selection" important—but you should. Apart from that, know that I regard the research that you and your wife as extremely important, and I hope that you continue with it!

Appendix

Below is the interchange that occurred shortly after I sent the above to Bloom (on Monday, July 29, 2013). Bloom's response came rather quickly, and *I* responded quickly to Bloom's response. I don't know if Bloom's response would have been different had he waited longer to respond (and it's *conceivable* that I will receive another response from him today—although I don't *expect* one), but I know that *mine* would have been.

As I write now, it is 6:15 A.M. on July 30, 2013, and what strikes me about Bloom's response is that it indicates that he had not read my email carefully before he responded. I find the carelessness that this represents troubling—and wonder if the same carelessness characterizes his research. I hope not!

One of my purposes in writing the email was to clarify (very briefly—but with a link to my eBook, in which I discuss the concept at length) the meaning given "natural selection" by Charles Darwin, and to note the deficiencies in that concept—and then emphasize the fact that Darwin's concept of "natural selection" has no relevance for human evolution, with *other* mechanisms, rather, having relevance (I identify *three* other such mechanisms). Bloom's response evinces no recognition of having read that presentation; what Bloom did instead was to

repeat *his* concept of "natural selection," as if it were the *definitive* concept. My reaction: Pathetic!

The comments that Bloom *does* make about "natural selection" assume a definition of the term that Bloom fails to specify—perhaps because he believes that the meaning of "natural selection" is common knowledge, so that there is no *need* for him to specify the meaning that he is attaching to the term. However, his comments relative to the term demonstrate an abysmal ignorance of the fact that *several* different mechanisms have operated to produce the modern human as a biological entity, with "natural selection" as defined by Darwin *not* being one of them. Also, he demonstrates no recognition of the fact that the *modern* definition of that term is virtually worthless—because it makes *no* reference at all to *mechanisms* bringing about biological change.

What follows, then, is our interchange from yesterday:

You may change your mind about "natural selection" after reading Chapter 8 in the eBook to which I provided a link. Obviously you haven't read it yet—and perhaps never will, but that's your choice . . . .

Al

From: Paul Bloom [mailto:paul.bloom@yale.edu]
Sent: Monday, July 29, 2013 9:37 AM
To: Al Thompson
Subject: Re: comments on 60 Minutes segment

Dear Alton Thompson,

I couldn't disagree with you more about natural selection -- far from being a tautology, it is an elegant and powerful theory that is the only known explanation for adaptive complexity, including the richness of our mental lives.

Still, I appreciate your kind and thoughtful words about our research, and wish you all the best.

sincerely,

-- Paul Bloom

Statements and the Existing Order

Alton C. Thompson

One basis for classifying the statements (orally-delivered, as well as written) made by others is that of how they relate to the Existing Order. Here is an example of such a classification; a *given* statement, or *collection* of statements:

A. *Serves* the interests of the Existing Order and its elite:

    1. By initiating the production, and then publicizing, of *erroneous* and/or *ideologically-tainted* information regarding the workings of the Existing Order.

> *Examples: Virtually everything that Pres. O'Bomber says is factually suspect; what [Mary McCarthy](#) [said](#) about [Lillian Hellman](#)—"every word she writes is a lie, including 'and' and the'" (!)—also applies to O'Bomber (see [this](#), e.g.)—and most politicians, in fact. And statements made in documents issued by the U. S. Chamber of Commerce would be expected to exhibit a [neo-liberal](#) bias.*

    2. By initiating, and then promoting, developments that *divert attention* away from the workings of the Existing Order:

        a. Forms of *entertainment (a special sort of "statement)*.

> *Examples: Professional sports, television programs, rock concerts, etc.*

        b. Information that is *true*, and perhaps even *interesting*, but which is *irrelevant* so far as the workings of the Existing Order is concerned.

> *Example: Publications of the National Geographic Society.*

B. Is *subversive* of the Existing Order and its elite:

    1. *Exposés*—honestly and in detail—the *workings* of the Existing Order, and the role of the elite in those workings.

> *Examples: Web sites such as BNW, Counterpunch, Alternet, Truth-Out, Truthdig, Tom Dispatch, etc.*

2. Suggests *goals* that an alternate society should be based on.
   Example: Chapters 2 – 4 of my [What Are Churches For?](#)

3. Offers a "picture" of an *alternate* society—how the given society might be. Designed.

   Examples: Much of the "[utopian" literature](#) written over the centuries would fall into this category.

   a. Suggests a *plan* for achieving that alternate society.

   Example: My "[Ecotopia: A 'Gerendipitous' Scenario](#)."

   b. Suggests "nuts and bolts" ideas for *implementing* that plan.

   Example: My recent "Community 'Talking Points.'" (sent to BNW, but not yet posted).

Classifications created *solely* for the purpose of classifying fall into the "A.2.b." category—which is not to say, however, that such classifications are "bad" or useless. Today, however, we are living during a unique phase of world history—a time when we can look into the near future and see certain disaster, so that there is little justification for attending to classifications in that category.

As the above classification suggests, given that many of the statements that we encounter in our everyday lives fall into the "A" category, most of those we live among are *unaware* of the perilous situation within which we live because of global warming. On the one hand, the attention of huge numbers is turned in directions *other* than the ominous future that faces us because of this threat. And on the other hand, many of our leaders are in the "[denier](#)" category. And the *Wall Street Journal* (unsurprisingly!) recently carried an article titled "[*No Need to Panic About Global Warmin*](#)g" (a claim refuted by, e.g., [William D. Nordhaus](#)).

Given that the media are owned primarily by very rich individuals, and the minds of many of *those* individuals seem to be saturated in the juices of [neo-liberalism](#), it is not surprising that the deniers receive more "press" than do genuine scientists. The end result of these facts, however, is that:

- Many in our society are so occupied with the trivial that they simply give no thought at all to the future.

  This point was "hammered home" to me last night (October 30, 2013) while a friend and I were at the [Potawatomi casino](#) in Milwaukee (owned by the [Potawatomi Nation](#), an

indigenous group). Not myself being one who frequents casinos (nor is my friend, by the way!), when my friend asked me if I would like to go with him for a free buffet meal (for which he had vouchers), I told him I would. In arriving at this huge facility (with free parking in a 4-level parking garage), I was astounded by the large number of people present there when we arrived around 4:00 p.m. "Can't these people find a better way to spend their time?," I asked myself. Why don't some of them do volunteer work, as I do (regularly visiting a diabetic whose left leg is amputated just below the knee, and whose mobility is severely limited)? I enjoy my interactions with this man, and pity these poor casino-goers for (a) depriving themselves of the enjoyment and satisfaction that comes from helping others—for (b) subjecting themselves to the din in that building (enough to make one deaf!), to say nothing of (c) subjecting themselves to a drain of their monetary resources.

What a way of live!—but huge numbers of people *are* living this inane way.

- Those who *do* give some thought about the future are subjected to false propaganda about global warming—such as that given in the *Wall Street Journal* article cited above.

In either case the result is the same: *Ignorance* about the future, resulting in acceptance of the tacit assumption that *tomorrow* and the day after . . . will be much like *today*.

Does a species whose *educated* citizens are aware of the threat posed by global warming, but whose *other* citizens are not, *deserve* to survive?

Probably not! But as one with three children and four (about to be five) grandchildren, I find that prospect unacceptable. But what can I *do* about it? (I wish that this were more than a rhetorical question!)

An Alternate Solution to the Poverty Problem

Alton C. Thompson

My Congressman, Rep. Paul Ryan, a Republican, held a hearing recently of the House Budget Committee, of which he is Chairman. (I say "my" here *only* to mean that I live in the Congressional district which he "represents." I have *never* voted for him!) The title of the hearing was "War on Poverty: A Progress Report."

Of the witnesses who spoke at the hearing, the only Democratic one was Sister Simone Campbell, who "is the executive director of NETWORK, a national Catholic social justice lobby, but . . . is more widely known as the leader of the Nuns on the Bus."

Sister Campbell noted that programs of the national government have been helpful in fighting poverty:

> "In 2011, government benefits lifted a total of 40 million people out of poverty," she testified. "While Social Security [which is *not* a "welfare" program!] has the largest impact of any single program, means-tested programs such as SNAP [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, i.e., "food stamps"], SSI [supplemental social security] and the EITC [Earned Income Tax Credit] lifted almost 20 million Americans, including 8 ½ million children, out of poverty."
>
> She also noted that "poor babies in the 1960s and 1970s who were fortunate enough to live in counties served by the Food Stamp Program…were healthier as adults and were more likely to finish high school" than poor babies who lived in counties that didn't yet have the program. (They also scored higher on a "self-sufficiency" index that included adult outcomes like earnings, income and decreases in welfare participation.)

Despite these positive facts,

> the House Republican[s have a] proposal to cut $20.5 billion from SNAP (food stamps) over ten years [, which] would lead to approximately 5 million people being eliminated from the program, and would increase federal and state health care costs by $15 billion *for diabetes alone* over ten years. Further, Ranking Member Chris Van Hollen [a Democrat] of Maryland noted that the Republican House budget would cut "$810 billion from base Medicaid funding" and that "Medicaid [would] be cut by one-third in 2023."

Republicans (and many Democrats as well!) usually show little hesitation in supporting—and lavishly!—programs for the inaptly named "Department of Defense"—whose activities tend to be highly *offensive*, in both senses of that word! But when it comes to "*people* programs"—i.e., ones to stimulate employment, good working conditions (including livable incomes), medical care, education, aid for the unemployed, etc.—most Republicans seem to make a distinction between the "deserving" and the "undeserving."

Despite the rhetoric that they use in explaining themselves, a large part of their reason for lavishing money on the Pentagon is that government contracts—which have been *particularly* huge for military contractors—have made thousands of individuals millionaire over the decades. In Republican eyes, the rich are the "deserving" element of our population, and "therefore" should be made even richer! To say that this represents demented reasoning is to show courtesy to these dinosaurs!

A "blame the victim" mentality comes into play with these Troglodytes when the group-to-be-helped is the poor. Virtually by definition, for Republicans, such people are "undeserving"—individuals who are poor because, e.g., they are lazy or stupid; people who, if they *applied* themselves, would be able to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps."

Contrary evidence as to why people are poor is ignored by most Republicans, so "possessed" they are by a "blame the victim" mentality. Only during periods when the Democrats have been in control, have various aid programs for the poor managed to get through Congress; but under recent Democratic presidents—such as Bill Clinton, and the current Barack O'Bomber—there has been a steady move in a right-ward direction.

Given that empirical research (such as that reported by Sister Campbell) and logical reasoning don't seem to "work" in convincing Republicans (and many Democrats as well), perhaps a different approach entirely needs to be tried

What I have in mind is the writing of a work similar to Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal: For preventing the children of poor people in Ireland,from being a burden on their parents or country,and for making them beneficial to the publick* (1729). Swift begins his famous essay by stating:

> I think it is agreed by all parties, that this prodigious number of children in the arms, or on the backs, or at the heels of their mothers, and frequently of their fathers, is in the present deplorable state of the kingdom, a very great additional grievance; and therefore whoever could find out a fair, cheap and easy method of making these children sound and useful members of the common-wealth, would deserve so well of the publick, as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation.

Swift's unexpected—and shocking—solution:

> I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricasie, or a ragout.

> I do therefore humbly offer it to publick consideration, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one fourth part to be males; which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle, or swine,

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and my reason is, that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages, therefore, one male will be sufficient to serve four females. That the remaining hundred thousand may, at a year old, be offered in sale to the persons of quality and fortune, through the kingdom, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump, and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends, and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt, will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter.

What I wish is that Minnesota Senator Alan ("Al") Franken, because of his former connection with *Saturday Night Live*) and, therefore, his acquaintance with comedic writers, would convince one of them to write a satire on the order of Swift's, but oriented to the poor (and not just poor *children*) in this country, and then himself deliver this to an audience in the U. S. Senate. It would thereby gain wide publicity, and might "do the trick" in causing members of the right wing in Congress to realize how inhumane—how *unchristian*, in fact—their views are.

It is beyond my ability to suggest the contents of such a satire, but the movie Soylent Green comes to mind as a possible model. It will be recalled that in that movie there were facilities for accomplishing suicide in a pleasant environment—with the bodies then converted into food for human consumption!

What the satire I have in mind might focus on, rather, is the creation of "Vitermination Clinics" (the "vitermination" here being a combination of "vita" (i.e., "life") and "termination"), that would, however, differ from those in *Soylent Green* in that:

- They would be created as a "solution" to the *poverty* problem, with those who are poor being encouraged to end their lives in a pleasant way, perhaps being instructed that this would be a speedy journey to a "better place." The clinics would provide their service free of charge—and be available for use by anyone who wanted to use them, not just the poor.

- Food—not even for animals—would *NOT* be created from the bodies. They might, however, be converted into fertilizer. My rationale for the latter is that the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District uses the "material" that it gathers for producing a fertilizer, Milorganite. Thus, if human and other wastes are good enough as a "raw" material for fertilizer, surely *the entire human body*—the waste in it and all!—is also good enough to be used in creating fertilizer.

I *am* serious about this: I have already sent it to Sen. Franken's office. (The likelihood that he is a Minnesota Vikings fan rather than a Green Bay Packers fan is *his* problem, not mine! I like him anyway!)

Organizations as a Problem

Alton C. Thompson

Chris Hedges—currently a columnist with Truthdig, but a foreign correspondent with *The New York Times* for almost 20 years—left the *Times* after being "issued a formal reprimand for denouncing the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq." Evidently, having moral integrity disqualifies one for employment with that "venerable" institution!

Some might accuse Hedges of "sour grapes" for what he wrote about the *Times* two years ago, but I have too much respect for the man to make such an accusation. I believe, rather, that what Hedges said about the *Times* has considerable veracity:

> *The Times*, like Harvard University, where I attended graduate school, is one of the country's most elite and exclusive institutions. Its ethos can be best summed up with the phrase "You are lucky to be here." That huge numbers of people at The Times, as at Harvard, buy into this institutional hubris makes the paper, where I spent 15 years—nearly all of them, thankfully, as a foreign correspondent a few thousand miles from the newsroom—a fear-ridden and oppressive place to work. The Times newsroom, like most corporate nerve centers, is a labyrinth of:
>
> - intrigue
>
> - gossip
>
> - back-biting
>
> - rumor
>
> - false piety
>
> - rampant ambition
>
> - betrayal and
>
> - deception.

(I have added the "bullets" here for emphasis."

He concludes the paragraph in question by stating: "Those who play this game well are repugnant. They are also usually the people who run the place." (!) That is, the higher the position in the *Times* hierarchy, the greater the probability that one will possess these objectionable traits!

He added:

> When you allow an institution to provide you with your identity and sense of self-worth you become an obsequious pawn, no matter how much talent you possess. You live in perpetual fear of what those in authority think of you and might do to you. This mechanism of internalized control—for you always need them more than they need you—is effective. The rules of advancement at the paper are never clearly defined or written down. Careerists pay lip service to the stated ideals of the institution, which are couched in lofty rhetoric about balance, impartiality and neutrality, but astutely grasp the actual guiding principle of the paper, which is: Do not significantly alienate the corporate and political power elite on whom the institution depends for access and money. Those who master this duplicitous game do well. Those who cling tenaciously to a desire to tell the truth, even at a cost to themselves and the institution, become a management problem. This creates tremendous friction within the paper.

Hedges himself was able to escape the *Times* environment by virtue of being a foreign correspondent. But because the "reigning corporate ideology has infected the *Times* as it has most other liberal institutions," the fact that Hedges did not "buy into" that ideology eventually resulted in his leaving the institution.

Hedges came to realize that the *Times* had become a mere corporate tool, so that he could not, in good conscience, remain with that institution. As he put it: "The inability [of *Times* editors] to see that major centers of corporate power are criminal enterprises that are plundering the nation and destroying the ecosystem is evidence not of objectivity but moral bankruptcy"—and Hedges (whose father was a Presbyterian minister) decided that he could not, as a person with integrity, continue an affiliation with such an institution.

A question that arises here is whether the characteristics that Hedges attributed to the *Times* organization are unique to business organizations in *capitalist* countries, or are they simply a feature of large organizations *per se*?

A [recent textbook](#) on organizational behavior (whose [first chapter](#) is entitled "Capitalism and Organizational Behaviour") assures the student, at the beginning, that "This book will provide you with an accessible but critical introduction to organizational behavior. By 'critical' we mean that the book will help you reflect upon—and in your future professional life, perhaps act upon—how to make workplaces more effective given the challenges of global warming and resource depletion and, we would add, more equitable as well."

As one might expect "effectiveness" is the primary goal of the authors of this text, but to their credit they also refer to such societal—and beyond!—problems as global warming, resource depletion, and even inequality. Thus, although their orientation is clearly to *capitalism* (as is indicated by the first chapter), they seem to envision a benign version of capitalism.

(Whether they note, and discuss, the fact that no country on earth has anything approximating "capitalism," as envisioned by Adam Smith, I know not, not having read the book. Given that "Fascism views political violence, war, and imperialism as a means to achieve national rejuvenation and asserts that stronger nations have the right to obtain land and resources by displacing weaker nations," it is, however, clear that the United States is moving ever more in a fascist direction.)

The organizations that develop in a society likely *initially* reflect the unique characteristics of that society, but in reaching a certain stage of development seem to be influenced, in their further development, by the *size* of the organization itself. Thus, the organizations that develop in *different* societies, each somewhat unique in their early years, tend to *converge* in their characteristics over time—and as they increase in size. Thus, I suspect that the characteristics that Hedges observed in the *Times* organization is not that uncommon with organizations worldwide. The nature of an organization's "business" may, of course, *also* play a role here (i.e., whether it is a governmental organization, a financial one, an industrial one, an engineering organization, a medical one, etc.).

But *size* itself—in that it tends to be correlated with *complexity*—seems to be a critical factor. Just as anthropologist Douglas P. Fry has argued that "there is a correlation between increasing social complexity and the likelihood of war," so is it reasonable to expect that as organizations *within* a society grow in size/complexity, developments *within* the organization—such as those observed by Hedges in the *Times*—will change in a negative direction. Put another way, the "pathology of normalcy" that Erich Fromm associated with *societies* can also, one might argue, be observed in organizations *within* societies.

I would doubt that the textbook referred to earlier brings out this point—which makes me ask: Don't these authors realize that their claimed interest in global warming, resource depletion, and inequality are like the contents of Pres. O'Bomber's speeches—**hot air**?! If they were *truly* aware of the *bases* of these problems—e.g., that societal systems that have grown and developed to a point where they are "out of control"—they would recognize that:

- It's true that our society is becoming ever more inegalitarian, but in part that's a function of our becoming a society dominated by larger and larger organizations. Given that those who *occupy* those organizations (as *employees*, I mean here!) are not in a position to change that fact, your statement to students that they should be concerned with the problem of inequality rings false.

- Resource depletion *is* a problem, true, but the *immediate* problem that faces us is that of global warming—a multi-dimensional problem. Besides, how will the students who read your textbook—as employees in large organizations—be able to *do* anything about the problem of resource depletion? Especially, given that the *higher* the position that they

attain in their organization, the *less* likely that they will be concerned with *societal* problems **of any sort**!

- It's *too late* to halt further global warming. Thus, you are demonstrating your ignorance by telling students that when they enter the corporate world, and are working for a large organization, they should make decisions based, in part, on their concern for global warming.

When I see statements such as the one quoted above from a textbook, and see advertisements for colleges/universities, describing programs that will—so the advertisements claim—prepare students for an exciting career in some field(s), I despair. Why is it, I ask myself, that so many *educated* people in our midst are so ill-informed that they are blithefully unaware of the threat that global warming poses to us humans?

Granted that youth in our society are presented with few options, upon completing secondary school, other than going on for further schooling—to prepare themselves for positions in the economy. Thus, it is understandable that youth would pay attention to advertisements for colleges/universities.

But the faculty members and administrators associated with those institutions are doing their students no favor by preparing students for jobs that (a) may not be there upon graduation—and (b) *surely* will not be there within a few decades, when global warming will begin to rear its ugly head to an even greater extent than it has already.

Operationalizing "Freedom"

Alton C. Thompson

The following is an excerpt from a letter (written by a man who lives in a western suburb of Milwaukee) that was published recently in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (which I usually refer to as the *Milwaukee Urinal*):

> In a free country, inequality is a fact of life. I would much rather be unequal and free. It does no good to obsess about inequality. It does no good to wallow in envy and blame the rich for our state in life. With the right choices, attitudes, and behaviors, ordinary people in this country can better themselves.
>
> Winners make investments, create jobs, spend money and most pay millions in taxes. Should we tax them to death, cut them down to size?
>
> In his speech [on the economy on July 24, 2013], Obama seems to be rallying for the redistribution of wealth, equality forced by government policies. In my view, forced equality is worse than inequality because it limits success and diminishes our freedom.

I suspect that the perspective embedded in this letter is common to hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of USans (i.e., citizens of the United States). What I wish to do in this essay is to (a) briefly comment on that perspective, and then focus specifically on a concept— "freedom"—that plays an important role in the letter, (b) identifying difficulties involved in giving that word a clear meaning, and then (c) offering an "operational" definition of the term.

First, then, a few comments on the excerpt quoted above:

- It offers an *individualistic* perspective, in at least two senses of "individualistic":

    - It is *self*-oriented in that it indicates that the author is primarily interested— *ostensibly*, at least—with *his own* well-being, rather than the well-being of others.

    - It tacitly assumes that an individual's behavior is solely a function of *internal* causal factors (including—and especially—"free" choice), with *external* factors playing no role whatsoever.

- The argument that it offers is an *ideological* one: Not only does reflect the *values* held by its author, but the "factual" statements that he makes have a questionable "truth-value"— and he offers no evidence in *support* of those "factual" statements. Put another way, they are "faith-based" (!) rather than empirically-based statements. (See, e.g., this and this.)

- Despite the fact that the author's comments are *self*-oriented, he shows no awareness of the factors that bring true well-being to an individual. (See, e.g., Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society*, 1955, and Chapters 2 – 4 in my *What Are Churches* For*?).* What his comments imply is that he is "possessed" by the notion that material goods are the source of well-being—a notion that accords well with capitalist ideology, but which lacks empirical support.

- Ironically, despite the letter's implicit suggestion that the author is self-oriented, the *content* of his argument demonstrates that he suffers from "false consciousness" (a concept introduced by Karl Marx). Given my knowledge of the community within which he lives, it is a safe bet that he is not a wealthy individual. Yet, the argument that he presents is one that is supportive of our society's elite, rather than his own interests!

- His letter indicates that he is either *not* a Christian, or is a "*fundamentalist*" Christian— meaning that his views about the "ministry" of Jesus, as indicated in the four canonical gospels, is fundamentally wrong! (Which is not to say, however, that it is, or even *can* be, clearly known what that "ministry" was "about"—Reza Aslan's recent book on Jesus being but one of many examples of works that have attempted to describe the "real" Jesus. [1]

- The perspective of the letter is *pre-scientific*. Despite the fact that we live in an Age of Science, and the Scientific Revolution goes back at least to "the publication in 1543 of Nicolaus Copernicus's *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (*On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*)," many today have a mentality that is in part scientific, in part rather archaic.

In fact, it is this latter point that I would like to focus on in this essay, ending by offering an "operationalization" of the abstract concept "freedom."

Despite the fact that *individual* sciences (e.g., physics, biology, sociology, anthropology) differ one from another in *methods* of research, science *per se* can be thought of as having certain attributes, among them:

- Valuing *objectivity*—lacking bias in *what* is investigated and *how*, the latter indicated by the fact that scientists strive for "intersubjective reliability" in their observations and findings. This means that different individuals, in observing the same phenomena, will reach the same conclusions. In efforts to operationalize a given concept (such as "freedom"), different scientists may, it is true, have different views as to *how* to do so— for a "right" way may not exist—rarely does, in fact; but if scientists use the same procedures in studying something, the ideal is that they will reach similar, if not identical, conclusions.

- Valuing *precision* (a matter that I will be addressing shortly).

- Engaging in *controlled experimentation* where possible ("modeling" being a form of such experimentation—the Von Thünen model being a good example).

- Undertaking *statistical analyses* where the data gathered permit such analyses.

- Offering *naturalistic* (as opposed to supernaturalistic) explanations of the phenomena that they study (often using "covering laws").

The point about science that I would like to feature here, however, is that a fundamental assumption made by scientists is that *variation* is a basic fact of reality. *Dichotomous* thinking (e.g., us-them, yes-no, etc.) has not been *abandoned* by scientists, but a scientist's *expectation* is to observe *variety* in whatever phenomenon is being studied. This assumption is especially held by those scientists whose orientation is *empirical* rather than *theoretical*. [2]

Given this, the (empirically-oriented) scientist regards each individual unit in a given category as unique, and is interested in gathering accurate information for a *sample* of those individuals. Information (or "data") should not only be *accurate*, however, but also be as *precise* as possible—meaning that the *measurement scale* used should be the "highest" possible, given the nature of the phenomenon being studied. Measurement scales—from "lowest" to "highest" include—the nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio scales. In addition, although *counting* does not constitute measurement, strictly speaking, at times use of the counting (or "absolute") scale (consisting of positive whole numbers from 0 on up) is appropriate.

What I am leading up to here is the fact that when a modern person—one who is used to thinking in scientific terms, that is—encounters a term such as "freedom," s/he is likely to feel somewhat uneasy. The individual will probably recognize, or at least sense, that *dichotomous* thinking underlies use of this term, with the assumption being made that there are just two categories of behavior, *fre*e and *coerce*d—with nothing in between. The science-oriented individual, being used to perceiving virtually infinite *variety* in the world, is likely to at least sense that to think of behaviors as *either* "free" or "coerced" is to *distort* reality. It may occur to the individual that President Franklin D. Roosevelt famously used the word "freedom" in an unconventional way—in referring to freedoms *from* want and fear, along with freedoms *of* speech and worship. It is *un*likely, however, that the individual go beyond this to "flesh out" the meaning of "freedom" in a manner that might be more meaningful to him or her.

Let me take this opportunity, however, to suggest here how "freedom" might be "operationalized":

- Begin by creating a fairly lengthy list of possible human behaviors, striving for a list that would include behaviors that occur in the society in question (and *exclude* behaviors

unlikely to occur), striving to create a list that would include a representative sample of behaviors in the society in question.

- Administer the "test" to a large sample of the society's (adult) citizens, with each behavior on the list being given two categories, "doable" and "not doable" (i.e., a dichotomy). "Doable" here would mean that one is *able* to engage in the behavior, regards it as *advisable* (i.e., moral, legal), etc.—the "etc." included here to allow the given individual to *expand* the meaning of "doable" in a manner thought meaningful by the individual in question.

- Collect the "tests" and for each count the number of times that "doable" was selected, then divide that number by the total number of "questions" on the "test" to give a percent value.

Different individuals would be expected to obtain different "scores" on this "test"—and a *given* person would likely "score" somewhat differently at age 25 vs. 45 vs. 65, etc. However, the "scores" in any of these cases could be interpreted in this way:

> The "higher" one's "score" (i.e., the larger the percent value), the more "freedom" that individual has—at the time the person took the "test," at any rate.

As it is, the word "freedom" is an abstract term whose meaning is rather ambiguous—to the point of being basically vacuous! The virtue of the operationalization presented above is that it recognizes that individuals do *vary* in the degree of freedom that they have. Thus, insofar as freedom is something to be desired for *everyone*, knowing that many in the society have an "unacceptably" *low* amount of freedom presents one with the challenge of somehow *rectifying* the situation-e.g., by working to "convert" the society into one of cooperative eco-communities, in an effort *simultaneously* to adapt, insofar as is possible, to the ravages that global warming will be inflicting on us humans within a matter of decades (is *already* inflicting, for that matter!).

Endnotes

1. Despite attempts to discredit Aslan's credentials—e.g. *Fox* news's disgraceful attempt, and this—Aslan is a highly-respected scholar. Which is not to say, however, that his work is not open to some criticism (also this).

2. The "economic man" assumption of Microeconomics is a "standardized" version of the human that lacks in realism (in that in assumes that all humans are identical in their needs, wants, etc.), but is thought of as "useful" by microeconomists in understanding interrelationships. Microeconomists often seem to forget this fact, however, and refer to real-world people as if they *were* identical—which can lead to serious errors of judgment.

The letter in question was written by a Gerald G. Patterson, who lives at 1556 S. 96th St. in West Allis, Wisconsin. In the White Pages, Mr. Patterson is listed as +65 years old. His residential location is depicted on the map below:
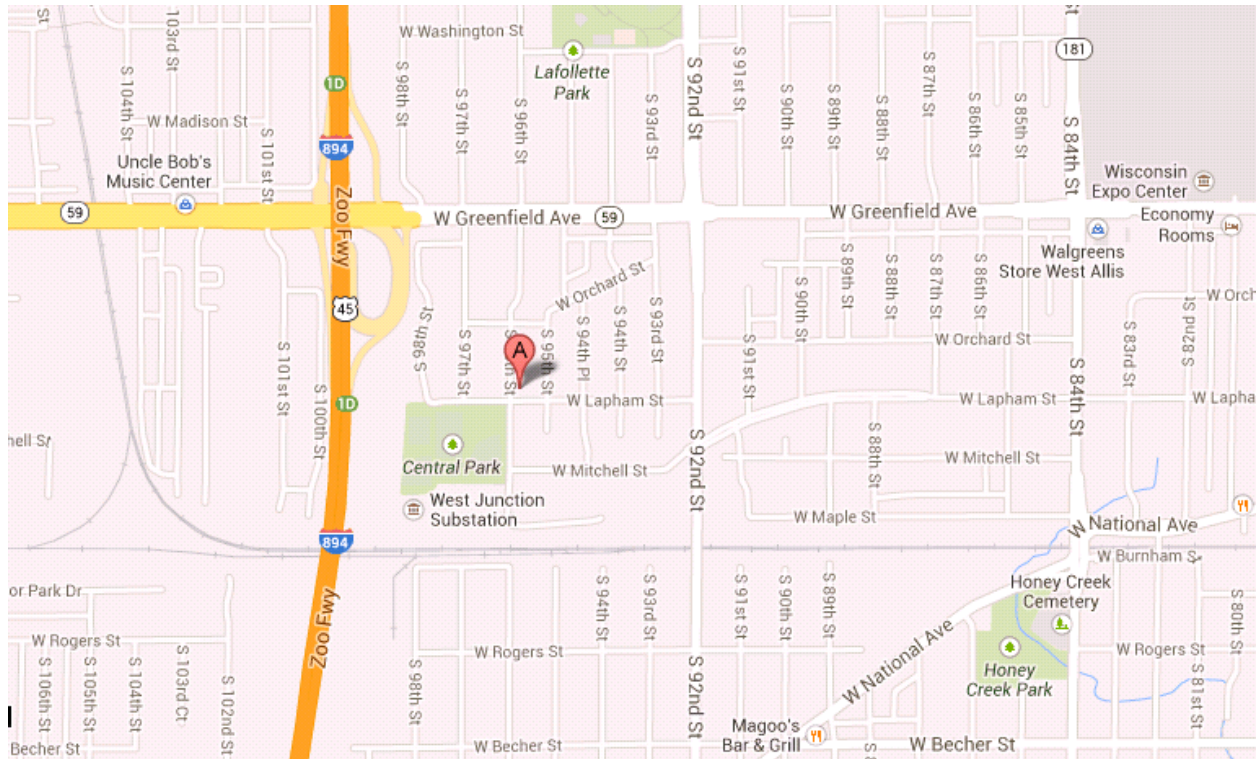
Which Alternative is Best?

Alton C. Thompson

The vast majority of climate scientists believe that (a) "global warming" (i.e., a range of phenomena caused by an increasing presence of "greenhouse" gases in the atmosphere) is occurring, (b) its fundamental cause is "anthropogenic" (i.e., human activities—our burning of fossil fuels), (c) it is already having a noticeable impact on human life (e.g., severe storms, droughts, wildfires), and (d) its impact will become increasingly great over the next few decades—perhaps at an *increasing* rate (given that global warming is a phenomenon that "feeds on itself." [1]

A *purely* academic approach to global warming is, however, foolish beyond belief—even for climate scientists!—given a question asked over 50 years ago by Everett Knight (*The Objective Society*, 1960, p. 32) regarding intellectuals: [2]

> how are they to justify their position in our society[,] which is that of a man seated on the rear of a lorry examining the road behind while an incompetent driver moves on at a reckless speed in what is perhaps the wrong direction?

Knight was writing at a time when global warming was on virtually no one's "radar"—so it is obvious that global warming was not on his mind when he made this statement. Despite that fact, however, what Knight said in 1960 is even more relevant today—given that global warming threatens our very continued existence as a species (to say nothing of *other* species).

It is clear to at least some people today that we are headed in "the wrong direction," and the question arises: What (a) *conceivable* responses to this threat are there; of them, which (b) *can* be implemented; and of *those* possibilities, which (c) *should* be implemented?

These are questions that are beyond the competence of climate scientists to address, so that we must (a) look to other experts, (b) use our ability to think logically, and our (c) "common sense," to arrive at possible answers. Starting here with the "(a)" part of the above question, I would— *today*, that is!—identify four possibilities; initiate:

1. A program of "carbon farming"—using, e.g., the species *Jatropha curcas*.

2. Some other geo-engineering program.

3. An eco-community program.

4. Nothing—let "nature take its course."

The objective of the first two programs would be *removal* of carbon from the atmosphere—the first one via "natural" means, other possibilities using (in most cases, at least) "artificial" means. The third program would be based on the assumption that the two geo-engineering programs either would not be implemented, or if implemented might (in the case of "other" geo-engineering programs) not work and/or might cause new—and potentially serious—problems not anticipated. The fourth "program" is not a program at all but, rather, is a "do nothing" program. Note that missing from my list is a program to *reduce* "greenhouse gas" emissions, the reason for that omission being the belief that it is so unlikely an option as to be not worth mentioning.

The "carbon farming" option is one that has just come onto the scene, being discussed in a recent article by five German scientists, and illustrated by them in this figure:
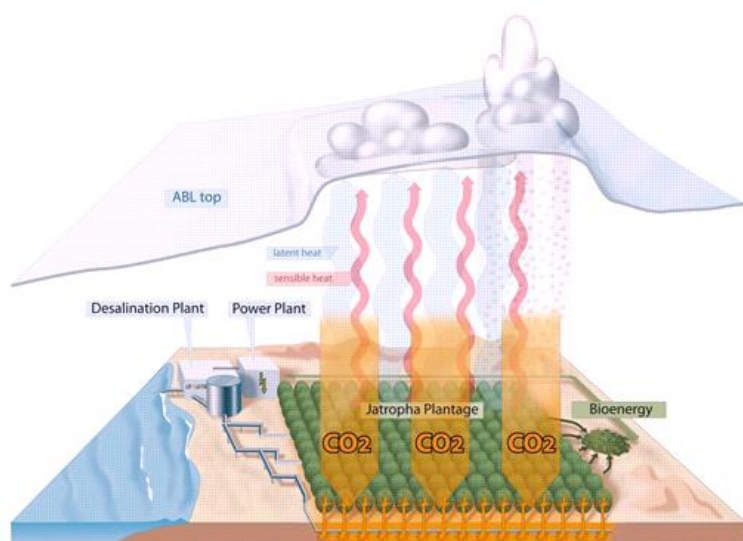
What this option involves, briefly, is the planting of a species of tree called *Jatropha curcas*. The scientists in question say of "the tree *Jatropha curcas* [that it] is very resistant to arid conditions and can thrive where food crops would not survive." They suggest planting the trees in desert area near the coast, with desalinization plants being built to provide the trees with water necessary for their growth.

The authors note that whereas other geo-engineering schemes would be expensive, and involve humans interfering with nature (with consequent unexpected consequences that might be "worse than the disease"—as James Lovelock has in effect argued), "this project merely encourages natural tree growth." The seemingly extravagant claim made by these scientists is that these trees, if enough of them were planted, "could take out most of the additional carbon dioxide emitted by humans since the beginning of the industrial revolution." Wow! That's amazing!

Were this option to be pursued, on the necessary scale, and soon, the problem of global warming would fade into the background, and humans could continue to live as they have been living— although the problem of resource depletion would remain as a problem, violence—state-sponsored and otherwise—would continue to be a problem, most people would continue to have an "unnatural" way of life, etc.

The "do nothing" option is clearly one that we should not be considering, but the question arises: *Why, then, is that the option that we are "pursuing"?!!* Surely, we are being extremely foolish in taking this option; why, then, are we taking it?! My answer:

We humans have made decisions that have enabled large organizations to emerge; given that those "running" these organizations tend to live in an intellectual world removed from reality (in part, because a certain type of person is drawn to such positions, in part because occupying such a position tends to have the effect of giving its occupier such a mentality), they are not able to make rational decisions. Because of that fact, they are unable to recognize the threat posed by global warming; and because of the fact that they "run the world," they will "lead us onto oblivion."

They will, that is, if we *let* them do so.

In saying that, I am most certainly *not* saying that we can change the thinking of "those in charge"—which, note, gives us a reason for rejecting the "carbon farming" option out of hand: It is a sort of program that would require government involvement on an important scale, and it is foolish to believe that such involvement would ever occur, given government's control by large corporations and their leaders. Even "other" geo-engineering measures are unlikely to be initiated by governments (which is probably a good thing!) for the same reasons.

What that leaves us with is *individual action*—i.e., individuals either acting alone (as individuals or individual family units), or individuals acting in concert with others. Given that such units would *not* be able to engage in a "carbon farming" project of the magnitude required to be effective, there is but one option available, and that is striving to *adapt* to the changes that will be inevitably occurring. As I have indicated in several previous essays, this could involve (a) homesteading, or it could involve (b) the creation of cooperative eco-communities—with the latter being the preferred option (if some semblance of civilized existence is to be maintained).

Some are already engaged in those options, but there is a need for more to do so—to increase the probability that at least *some* humans will be living in 2100 CE. However, for that to occur, some individuals with an abundance of resources—monetary and otherwise—will need to "step up to the plate" and begin exercising some leadership. *Will* that occur? Time will tell!

Endnotes

1. For example, as ice melts in the Arctic, the albedo of the area declines, resulting in more absorption of short-wave energy from the sun, that resulting in more heating of the ground, the consequence being more long-wave energy radiated from earth—and a heating, thereby, of the atmosphere.

2. A brief review of this book can be found here, starting on sheet 6.

Klare's Disappointing Conclusions

Alton C. Thompson

Michael T. Klare—a professor at Hampshire College in Massachusetts—has been a prolific author on a variety of important topics. Among the books that he has written are *War Without End* (1972), *Beyond the "Vietnam Syndrome"* (1981), *Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws* (1995), *Blood and Oil* (2004), and, most recently, *The Race for What's Left* (2012).

Yesterday (August 8, 2013) Tom Engelhardt posted Klare's "The Third Carbon Age: Don't for a Second Imagine We're Heading for an Era of Renewable Energy" on his web site, under the heading "Tomgram: Michael Klare, How to Fry a Planet." I assume that this article is based on his recent *The Race for What's Left*. In the article Klare:

- Offers comments on the prospects for renewable energy; and

- Puts the current energy situation in an historical context, dividing energy developments into a First Carbon Era, Second Carbon Era, and an Age of Unconventional Oil and Gas.

Klare then concludes his presentation under the heading "Surviving the Third Carbon Era"—and it is his comments in that section that are given especial attention in the present essay. Let me begin here, however, by briefly summarizing what Klare states in the first three sections of his paper. The significance of Klare's focus on *carbon* fuels is, of course, that not only are such fuels *non-renewable*, but that their *use* (when ignited) involves the transfer of carbon from below the earth's surface to the atmosphere—where it becomes a "greenhouse gas" that, with a sufficient "build-up" in the atmosphere, causes the set of phenomena that go under the label "global warming."

The First Carbon Era, notes Klare, began in the late eighteenth century, in Great Britain, when coal started to become the principal fuel used for firing up steam engines. Steam engines so fueled were initially used as a source of power in textile mills, but rapidly came to be used in other industrial enterprises as well—and also came to be used to power railroads and ships, in mining, in the production of iron, and eventually "to generate electricity, a field in which it remains dominant today."

The use of coal-based steam power is what enabled the Industrial Revolution to occur (with its introduction of horrid working conditions, including for children, the emergence of a working class, and the emergence of Great Britain as an imperialist nation). Besides the *social* problems created by the Industrial Revolution, however, there were problems associated with the increased use of coal for firing steam engines—not global warming at this time but, rather, air pollution. As Klare notes:

the coal then being consumed in England was of the brown lignite variety, "chock full of sulfur and other impurities." When burned, "it produced an acrid, choking smoke that stung the eyes and lungs and blackened walls and clothes." By the end of the nineteenth century, the air in London and other coal-powered cities was so polluted that "trees died, marble facades dissolved, and respiratory ailments became epidemic."

What Klare labels as the Second Carbon Era began in 1859, when the commercial production of oil began in western Pennsylvania. Klare adds, however, that the Age of Oil

> only truly took off after World War II, with the explosive growth of automobile ownership. Before 1940, oil played an important role in illumination and lubrication, among other applications, but remained subordinate to coal; after the war, oil became the world's principal source of energy. From 10 million barrels per day in 1950, global consumption soared to [77 million](#) in 2000, a half-century bacchanalia of fossil fuel burning.

Fortunately, Klare's interests are not confined to economic matters, and he adds that

> just as Britain experienced negative consequences from its excessive reliance on coal, so the United States—and the rest of the world—has suffered in various ways from its reliance on oil. To ensure the safety of its overseas sources of supply, Washington has established tortuous relationships with foreign oil suppliers and has fought several costly, debilitating wars in the Persian Gulf region, a sordid history I recount in *[Blood and Oil](#)*. Over-reliance on motor vehicles for personal and commercial transportation has left the country ill-equipped to deal with periodic supply disruptions and price spikes. Most of all, the vast increase in oil consumption—here and elsewhere—has produced a [corresponding increase](#) in carbon dioxide emissions, accelerating planetary warming (a process begun during the first carbon era) and exposing the country to the ever more devastating effects of climate change.

In my own writings I have focused on our increasing use of petroleum products as the major cause of global warming, but Klare adds the highly significant fact that this increasing use of oil has also been a major reason for the United States becoming an evil imperialist power—claiming to be a benign "do-gooder" country while in reality becoming the virtual opposite—evidence for which has been provided in abundance by, e.g., [William Blum](#), who maintains the [www.killinghope.org](#) web site, and who issues—free!—an "anti-empire report" each month to those who choose to be (as I am!) on his emailing list.

What Klare emphasizes regarding the current Age of Unconventional Oil and Gas is that (a) "conventional oil is disappearing" (as is natural gas) . . . [and] that "[Unconventional fuels](#)—especially heavy oils and [tar sands](#)—[which] tend to possess a higher proportion of carbon to hydrogen than conventional oil, and so release more carbon dioxide when burned" are increasingly coming to be used, their exploitation occurring in new areas (e.g., the Arctic and deep-offshore drilling in new areas), and that (b) new technologies are increasingly being used for extraction: "[Hydro-fracking](#)—the use of high-pressure water columns to shatter underground

shale formations and liberate the oil and natural gas supplies trapped within them—is being undertaken in ever more regions of the United States and in a growing number of foreign countries."

As the subtitle of Klare's article states rather clearly—and implies extreme disappointment on Klare's part—is that what is significantly lacking currently is a concerted effort to develop *renewable* sources of energy. Klare notes that Pres. O'Bomber (*my* label for our wonderful president!) offered a vision of an Age of Renewables "in a much-praised [by whom, I ask?!] June address on climate change," but that the fact of the matter is that "humanity is *not* [currently] entering a period that will be dominated by renewables." He states:

> According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), an inter-governmental research organization based in Paris, cumulative worldwide investment in new fossil-fuel extraction and processing will total an estimated $22.87 trillion between 2012 and 2035, while investment in renewables, hydropower, and nuclear energy will amount to only $7.32 trillion. In these years, investment in oil alone, at an estimated $10.32 trillion, is expected to exceed spending on wind, solar, geothermal, biofuels, hydro, nuclear, and every other form of renewable energy combined.

Given Klare's evident disappointment, if not disgust, with the direction in which we are currently heading, one anticipates some solid suggestions for moving in a different direction in his concluding "Surviving the Third Carbon Era." He begins his presentation here by stating that "the world will become increasingly dependent on the exploitation of unconventional energy. This, in turn, means an increase in the buildup of greenhouse gases with little possibility of averting the onset of catastrophic climate effects"—the link here being to Bill McKibben's "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math."

Strangely, although he had just said—through Bill McKibben—that the prospects ahead are "terrifying," he claims that

> Life in the third carbon era will not be without its benefits. Those who rely on fossil fuels for transportation, heating, and the like can perhaps take comfort from the fact that oil and natural gas will not run out soon, as was predicted by many energy analysts in the early years of this century. Banks, the energy corporations, and other economic interests will undoubtedly amass staggering profits from the explosive expansion of the unconventional oil business and global increases in the consumption of these fuels.

He then follows that curious statement by making the equally curious statement that

> most of us won't be rewarded. Quite the opposite. Instead, we'll experience the discomfort and suffering accompanying the heating of the planet, the scarcity of contested water supplies in many regions, and the evisceration of the natural landscape.

Evidently Dr. Klare is unaware of the concept of "climate commitment": the fact that the greenhouse gases *currently in the atmosphere* are sufficient to bring about an additional 1º C – 1.5º C. increase in the global mean. Klare doesn't seem to realize that:

- Given that the global mean temperature has *already* increased by 0.8º C. since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution; and

- The majority of climate scientists believe that an increase of 2º C. would likely result in "runaway" increase occurring; with

- Kerry Emanuel—cited in the Bill McKibben article cited by Klare (!)—placing the "safe" increase at 1º C.; and

- It being unlikely that geo-engineering measures—including "carbon farming"—will be instituted by our, or any other, government;

it follows that we humans are in deep trouble. For given that it is now too late to halt further global warming (because efforts that *could* halt it, such as "carbon farming" won't be engaged in), the climate "tipping point" is likely to be reached, and then crossed, within a matter of decades, making human existence increasingly difficult—to the point that most of the world's population may be wiped out (as argued by British climate scientist Kevin Anderson). [1]

Does this mean that our demise as a species is *inevitable*? It *might*, but that is no reason to simply sit back and wait for the "inevitable." Given that governments are unlikely to address this matter in any meaningful way, it is essential that *individuals* recognize that (a) *adaptive* measures offer us some hope, with (b) homesteading and the creation of cooperative eco-communities being two examples of adaptive measures. Does, however, Klare recognize these facts? Here are what Klare suggests:

- "Calling for greater investment in green energy is essential but insufficient . . . ."

- "Campaigning for curbs on carbon emissions is necessary, but will undoubtedly prove problematic . . . ."

- "Needed, in addition to such efforts, is a drive to expose the distinctiveness and the dangers of unconventional energy and to demonize those who choose to invest in these fuels rather than their green alternatives."

Wow! What impressive suggestions!—suggestions that exhibit such a deep understanding of the threat posed to us humans by global warming!

Needless to say, I find Klare's discussion of "answers" to the global warming problem less than satisfactory! Klare's recommendations have "klarity," it's true, but otherwise have little to excite me.

Endnote

1. See this; the article appears on a "denier" site, but that fact is beside the point here.

The Best Lack Conviction?

Alton C. Thompson

William Butler Yeats (1865 – 1939), in his "Second Coming," asserted:

> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
>   Are full of passionate intensity.

As to the *context* of the poem,

> The poem was written in 1919 in the aftermath of the First World War and was at first titled "The Second Birth". While the various manuscript revisions of the poem refer to the Renaissance, French Revolutions, the Irish rebellion, and the Revolutions of Germany and Russia, Richard Ellman and Harold Bloom suggest the text refers to the Russian Revolution of 1917.

In reading this poem *today*, however, what I think about is *global warming*, given that so often "passionate intensity" seems to be associated with "deniers." For example, this letter, written by a man who lives in a small community to the southwest of Milwaukee, that was published in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (i.e., *Milwaukee Urinal*) on August 2, 2013:

> To all you global warming/climate change zealots out there, including James M. Rhora, who recently had his anti-coal comments published in the Journal Sentinel, I have news for you ("Science clear on climate change," Your Views, July 30).
>
> I don't care one iota about global warming/climate change. On my list of 1,000 items that cause me concern in my life it is number 1,000. Why? I'll tell you. I'm sick and tired of all the left-wing, eco-freaks telling the rest of us to spend trillions on the latest fad when all they really want to do is destroy America.
>
> To me, they are just the latest in a long line of village idiots wanting to destroy America from within. They need to go away. Or better yet, they can move to China or India and plead their case to the real spoilers of Mother Earth.

As a person who was born and raised in Wisconsin—a state noted (except for the McCarthy Era!, and our present governor [1]) for its progressivism [2]—I feel embarrassed that the local newspaper would publish this letter (now you have some idea of why I refer to it as the *Milwaukee Urinal*!). But they did. And about all that one can say about this letter is that it is "passionate"!

But if many "deniers" are passionate in their denial (*why* this is the case is not clear—but psychological factors are likely involved), is it also true that "climate change believers"—who I am not claiming, with Yeats, that they are the "best" among us!—are lacking in conviction?

I will grant that "believers" likely vary in their *degree* of commitment in their belief in the reality of "climate change" (which I prefer to call "Trendular Atmospheric Depatternization," or TAD, because the former is a tad long!). And although most "believers" may lack *passion* regarding their commitment to their belief in global warming, I don't think that it would be accurate to characterize them as lacking *conviction*. Rather, I would identify the following categories with "believers":

- Those who look to government—the national government in particular—to address this problem.

- People who lack confidence in government, given its control by the wealthy (individuals and corporations), who are so fixated on the "bottom line" that they have blinded themselves to the reality of global warming, but don't know where else to turn. As a consequence, they don't know what to do—and end up doing nothing, and are by no means happy with themselves for this "choice."

- Individuals who lack confidence in government (for the same reasons), but who recognize that insofar as there is an answer to this problem, it lies with trying to adapt. This category can be thought of as consisting of two subcategories, (a) those who are *acting* on that belief, and (b) those who would *like* to do so but lack the means to do so— or are otherwise held back (e.g., family responsibilities/ties) from acting. In both cases it's possible, of course, that variations exist in interpreting the best course to follow in "adapting."

It is clear to me that most "believers" are in the first of these three categories—and that's unfortunate, for it's foolish to look to government in this case. How many are in the other two categories (or the various subcategories associated with the third category) I won't hazard to guess—except to say that I wish that some leadership would arise, so that an actual "adaptation movement" gets underway. If that does not occur, I fear for the future of my grandchildren—for my species, in fact.

Endnotes

1. Scott Walker, who was involved in a recall election—which he won—thanks to massive financial support received from the Koch brothers.

2. *The Progressive* magazine, founded in 1909 by "Fighting Bob" LaFollette, is still being published; the University of Wisconsin (in Madison) has long been known for the progressivism of many of

its professors, etc. While a student at what (was then called) Wisconsin State College-Oshkosh, one of my professors—who had obtained his Ph. D. from UW-Madison, used William Appleman Williams's *The Contours of American History* (1961) as a text for his American History course. Lucky me!

Eco-Communities and Work

Alton C. Thompson

"Work" is a necessary part of life for most of us, but the question that arises for those of us who see our society as reaching a "breaking point," threatened not only by internal factors but by global warming, and who believe that the necessary response is moving in an eco-communitarian direction, is:

> Given that work *must* occur in any given eco-community, what should be the *nature* of that work?

In previous essays on this site (and in my eBook) I have emphasized that an eco-community should provide a *way of life*, for its residents, that accords with their "design specifications" as humans, the *specific* meaning of "design specifications" being decided upon by a given eco-community's adult members. However, I have said little about the nature of *work* in a given eco-community—which lacuna I regard as a deficiency. To correct that gap, I use the present essay to offer some suggestions—*principles*, if you will—regarding work as I conceive it in an eco-community. In a sense, what I present here is my version of what the late (died 1977) E. F. Schumacher called "Good Work":

- The *kinds* of work to be done in a given eco-community would be *jointly decided upon* by the community's adult members. A category such as "food production" would, of course, be a "given;" but *specifics* as to *what* foods to produce, and *how*, would require decision-making by the community's adult members.

- The kinds of work so decided upon should be regarded, by all members, as *worthwhile*, so that those performing a given task(s) are able to perceive their work as *meaningful*—as contributing to the work goals established by the community for itself.

- *All* able-bodied members of the community would be expected to perform work. However, characteristics that some members might have (e.g., age, physical handicaps) that would limit either (a) the *kind* of work that they could do or (b) the amount of *time*, per week, that they could work, would be recognized, and no penalties would be associated with having limitations—for the members of the community would understand that they were working for the good of the *community*, not for *individual* advancement..

- Depending on the size of the community (I assume that a given community would be small at its inception, but grow over time—especially via in-migration, rather than natural increase—but not be allowed to grow to a population over 500), the (a) total amount of

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work and the (b) number of specific tasks would vary. The significance of variation in community size is that one's ability to *choose* one's work would increase with community size. Being able to choose the nature of one's work would be principle observed by the community, but members would need to recognize that if the community they live in is small, it might be necessary for them to engage in some work activities that do not "fit" them well, do not attract them, etc. Not only would members be expected to *recognize* this fact, but to *accept* it with a positive attitude.

- To provide any given member's work life with as much *variety* as the individual desires—this variety being provided via a scheme of job rotation. As the previous point suggests, however, with a smaller community some of the variety in one's work life might be *required* rather than *chosen*, and obtained through the performance of a variety of tasks during a given time period rather than job rotation.

- Individual tasks (or task sets) should be designed on the basis of work requirements, on the one hand, but should also be "personalized," so far as possible. That is, they should "fit" the "skill set," knowledge level, interests, etc., of the individual performing the task(s).

- Fulfillment of the previous principle will ensure that one feels "comfortable" with the tasks that one is performing, but given that boredom can result from being perpetually comfortable, some *challenge* should be introduced into everyone's work life—being careful, however, to not introduce so much challenge as to induce stress. The reason for introducing some degree of challenge in one's work is that *meeting* a challenge gives one a sense of accomplishment, and contributes to one's self image.

- So far as possible (this goal being easiest to meet the larger the community), work should be designed to permit people working cooperatively with other members of the society. This would not only meet one's meet for interacting, harmoniously, with others, but would help develop feelings of mutual trust and respect one for another. In addition, work done in a cooperative manner might prove to be more *productive* that work not done in that manner!

- Each member of a community should regard each other member as an equal—in *importance*. That is, although one may recognize that others have skills/knowledge that one does not oneself has, one thinks of the community itself as analogous to a human body, with each part being a necessary part of the whole. Given that each member of the community is regarded as a necessary part of that community—neither more important, nor less important, than any other part—it follows that the *output* of the community's work would be distributed on the basis of need.

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- Members of the community should strive to minimize their needs, on the one hand, and also strive to make their work as efficient as possible—so that the total amount of time spent working, by community members, would be minimized.

- Realization of *that* principle would mean that the "free time" available to community members would be maximized—with community members encouraged to use that free time in any manner they chose.

- Finally, *that* principle implies that *individuality*, rather than *conformity*, would be prized by the community. Use of the "Structured Interaction Group" institution, on a regular basis, should help promote a valuing of individuality.

Please note that the above are suggestions, merely, and could be used as among the "talking points" for a group of people intent on creating an eco-community for themselves, and desiring to maximize the probability of their community's success by engaging in a thorough process of discussion prior to actually taking steps to select a site for the community, and then actually create it (or have it created).

Once a discussion process was initiated, it would, of course, be discovered that numerous other questions of a more specific nature would arise, and that would be good. For the more thoroughly the concerns of prospective communitarians are identified and discussed, the higher the probability that those who then choose to go ahead with the community-building effort will be successful.

Once a community has been created, and becomes populated with the initial planners, the members of the community may want to expand the size of their community. If they do, they will be able to advertise their community in a manner that will ensure that those attracted to it will be a good "fit" for the community. New members can be expected to have their own ideas for improvement, and those ideas should be listened to so that the community remains alive—with the changes made being (Amish-like) ones to which the vast majority of community members give their assent.

Another Foolish—No, Dangerous!—Article

Alton C. Thompson

A recent article in *The Atlantic* begins with this statement:

> If we're to avoid destructive climate fluctuations, scientists say we need to slow, and eventually halt, the emission of greenhouse gases that do and will continue to produce global warming.

He then goes on to indicate what the "thrust" of his article will be:

> Let's look at which fuels, and countries, produce the highest levels of carbon dioxide pollution, and how we can try to rein these emissions in.

That is, the underlying assumption of his article is that greenhouse gas emissions *can* be halted, and eventually *will* be, so that it's important *now* to determine (a) *what* fuels are "contributing" to global warming, and (b) *where*, in terms of countries, this "contribution" is the greatest.

Unfortunately for this author, the assumptions that underlie his article are questionable—i.e., the assumptions that global warming can—and will—be halted.

Of these two claims, the tendency is to give attention primarily to the first one, and to reach optimistic conclusions—which are then interpreted to mean that because the global warming problem *can* be solved, it *will* be. For example, a group of German scientists concluded recently that "carbon farming"—using, e.g., the tree species *Jatropha curcas*—has the potential of removing all "excess" carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, thereby causing the global warming problem to go away. But this raises two questions:

- Are they correct in making their claim?

- If they are, does it follow that their ideas *will*—therefore—be implemented?

I am not a climate scientist, but I believe that there are reasons to doubt their claim. Let me explain why.

Such a program could not be implemented "overnight." Given that it would need to be undertaken by governments, time would be required to plan a program (perhaps in conjunction with other governments), to get it approved formally by the government, and to then implement it. The implementation phase would require the planning and building of desalization plants, and the planting of trees could begin only until such plants were operational. Given that these steps would likely require several years to complete, and the initial plantings would likely be small, after the first year of planting the amount of carbon removed from the atmosphere would be

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rather miniscule—with the amount of carbon *released* into the atmosphere that year greatly overshadowing the amount *removed*.

As the program expanded year after year—and let us assume expansion at an increasing rate—it's likely that there would *not* be a corresponding decrease in emissions—for the energy companies show no signs of reducing their production of carbon fuels. Thus, it's likely that only after a fairly long period of time would the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere begin to actually decline—and only after a still longer period of time would this program have reduced the carbon in the atmosphere to a pre-industrial level—2013 plus X years.

During time between now and X heating would continue—but not just because the carbon level of the atmosphere continued to be above the pre-industrial level. The heating that would occur would cause an increase in the melting of ice and snow in the polar regions, which would result in more land area being exposed to sunlight. Because such surfaces have a lower albedo than do surfaces covered by ice and snow, they would thereby absorb more of the short-wave energy reaching the earth from the sun. Those areas would then warm more than they would otherwise, and would then emit long-wave heat energy into the atmosphere—which would warm the atmosphere!

Thus, even if the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere were suddenly (magically!) to be reduced to the pre-industrial level, the exposure of more land via the melting of ice and snow would *in itself* cause an increase in the global mean; and as that would increase, there would be still more melting of ice and snow, and still more warming . . . .

The point that I am trying to make here is that global warming is a process that "feeds upon itself," and the German scientists in question don't seem aware of that fact. They don't seem to realize that restoring the atmosphere to its pre-Industrial Revolution level of greenhouse gas presence would not only not be an easy task, but would not in itself cause a restoration of atmospheric conditions as they existed in, say 1750 CE.

Note that I have been assuming here that a concerted effort would be made to implement this tree-growing plan proposed by German scientists, but (a) even a concerted effort would likely fail to prevent the "tipping point" being reached, and crossed; and (b) it's highly unlikely that their plan *will* be implemented, even on a modest scale: The politics necessary for its implementation don't exist. Thus, the assumptions that such a plan *can*, and *will*, be implemented are without merit.

I should add that not only does the increasing disappearance of ice and snow present problems, but so does the thawing of permafrost—for that thawing results in the release of methane gas, which is about 20 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide (CO_2). As I am not sure whether the German scientists' solution would "work" with *methane* gas, as compared with carbon dioxide (not myself being a physical scientist), I am unable to comment on the adequacy of their solution, so far as methane gas is concerned. But even assuming that their solution

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would "work" in getting rid of methane gas in the atmosphere, I have doubts that efforts to implement their solution could keep pace with the emission of methane gas into the atmosphere—so that it is entirely possible that "runaway" climate change would occur during the period of the program's implementation, resulting in most of the world's population being wiped out (with even the possibility that our species would be rendered extinct!).

More important with this "could keep pace" matter, however, are the facts that (a) the implementation of their "program" would, as I noted earlier, require the efforts of governments, such as that of the United States, and (b) the likelihood (I believe) is that such a program would simply not be undertaken. That is, the political realities in our world today do not bode well for such a program being implemented. Michael T. Klare has recently reported the disappointing news that the energy companies are retaining their commitment to fossil fuels at the expense of "safe" alternatives; and *that* fact—in conjunction with the fact that our government (*most* governments, in fact) are under elite control—suggests that governments will either (a) ignore proposals such as that suggested by these German scientists, will (b) implement them half-heartedly, or (c) if they adopt them at all, will do so too late. There is even, of course, the possibility that *whatever* programs (of a geo-engineering nature) instituted by governments to address the global warming will introduce new *unanticipated* problems that turn out to be even "worse than the disease."

It is clear to me, at least, that "tinkering" with Nature is a bad idea—that the problem that we *now* face with global warming is a result of *in*advertent tinkering, and that "advertent" tinkering is likely to simply *intensify* existing problems, and cause problems that we cannot now anticipate "down the road."

Now if that's the case, and it's also the case that reaching, and then going beyond, the "tipping point," is virtually inevitable, it would seem that our only choice is to engage in adaptive activities such as homesteading and eco-community creation, with the latter being the preferred option.

Articles such as the one in *The Atlantic* referred to above, rather than being helpful, simply increase the probability that global warming will render our species extinct before the century is out.

Is Being "Green" Enough?

Alton C. Thompson

Sierra—the magazine of the Sierra Club—just published their current list of what they regard as the ten "coolest" schools in the United States—i.e., the "greenest" colleges. These ranged from the University of Connecticut (with a score of 850 out of 1000) to the University of California, Santa Barbara (757). What do these schools do right? According to a recent analysis they tend to:

- Have organic gardens.

- Provide coursework pertaining to sustainability.

- Serve protein-rich vegan meals on campus.

- Provide for the protection of wildlife on school property.

- Have bike-sharing programs.

- Have been able to reduce their waste production significantly.

- Attempt, in making financial investments, to consider the environmental and social impacts of those investments—withholding investments from firms regarded as having negative such impacts.

I suppose that all of these are worthy efforts, but what should be noted about them is that all of the objectives (listed above) pursued tacitly assume that the Existing Order not only *can*, but *will*, continue indefinitely.

As of 1849, John Muir—the founder of the Sierra Club—began living, with his parents, on a farm near Portage, Wisconsin—about 65 miles from where I grew up (Mt. Morris, Wisconsin). (See map on left.) As Muir and I grew up under somewhat similar circumstances (my father was a carpenter, but both he and my mother had grown up on adjacent farms), I

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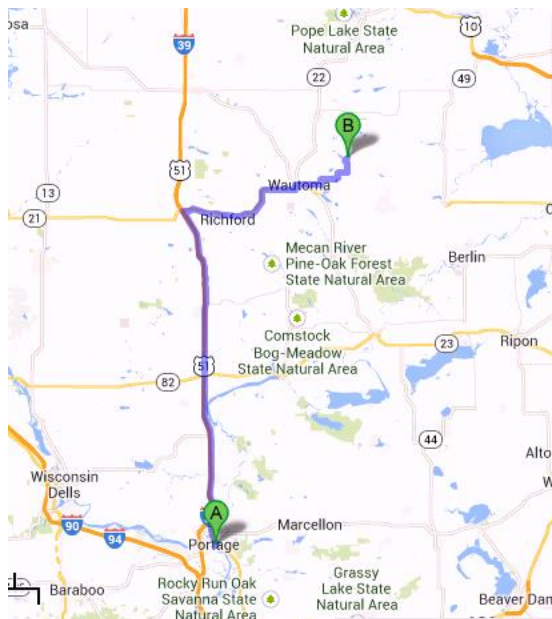
wonder if Muir's reaction to the above list would be similar to mine.

My reaction being that the seriousness of our current situation—relative to global warming, in particular—is such that assuming that the Existing Order can, and will, continue on indefinitely is a grievous mistake.

In my recent "The Inevitability of Climate Change" I argue that "The 'progress' of global warming to date has been such that efforts to halt further warming are likely to be futile. At some point in the near future geo-engineering efforts may be instituted by national governments, but such efforts are likely to fail—with the possibility, even, that they will exacerbate the situation by introducing new problems." (I would now add that although the "natural" geo-engineering ideas presented recently by a group of German scientists seem to have promise, I have doubts that they (a) *could* be implemented quickly enough to prevent a "tipping point" from being reached, or (b) even *would* be.)

Given my rather firm belief that even the best efforts would not be able to prevent "runaway" climate change from occurring, I see (a) no good options at all, but (b) the option of trying to *adapt* to the changes that will be inevitably coming our way. I have no way of knowing if John Muir would agree with me on this, but I would like to think that he was an astute enough man that were he living today, he would recognize adaptation as our only rational option.

It's certainly possible that my growing up "close to the land" *predisposed* me to reach the conclusion that our only option now—insofar as we *have* any!—is that of trying to adapt (and that Muir might likewise be so predisposed, were he living today, given that he also grew up "close to the land"). I would like to think, however, that even if my early life *did* predispose me in that direction, I have reached that conclusion by applying logical reasoning to scientific findings. [1]

What I am possibly suggesting here is that the definition of "green" used by the Sierra Club in rating colleges may reflect (a) an upbringing in a more urban environment by those who are now in charge of the Sierra Club, which has (b) resulted in a commitment to such an environment—a commitment to the Existing Order.

What I find conceivable is that my current living in an urban (suburban, actually) environment, whereas as a youth I lived in a rural/small town environment, enables me to relate, intellectually, to both sorts of environment, whereas this may not be true of those currently in charge of the Sierra Club. If that's the case, it would be understandable why those individuals would have developed, and retained, a commitment to an urban environment (and, thereby, the Existing Order), and would therefore have difficulty imagining adaptation as a rational response to the global warming problem.

At any rate, I believe that the Club is "missing the boat" regarding how we should respond to the threat posed by global warming—and that this is reflected in their college ratings.

Endnote

1. I am reminded here of this statement: "This, then [i.e., "Uncivilised writing"], is the literary challenge of our age. So far, few have taken it up. The signs of the times flash out in urgent neon, but our literary lions have better things to read. Their art remains stuck in its own civilised bubble. The idea of civilisation is entangled, right down to its semantic roots, with city-dwelling, and this provokes a thought: if our writers seem unable to find new stories which might lead us through the times ahead, is this not a function of their metropolitan mentality? The big names of contemporary literature are equally at home in the fashionable quarters of London or New York, and their writing reflects the prejudices of the placeless, transnational elite to which they belong."

   This is from the *Manifesto* (2009) of the Dark Mountain Project.

The Language Obstacle to Change

Alton C. Thompson

For several centuries now *technological developments* have been a major phenomenon (set of *phenomena*, actually). They have resulted in the creation of numerous new *things*—which, in being given names, have added to our vocabulary. And the *use* of those new things has resulted in changes in our *way of life*.

Given that societies are *systems* (thereby consisting of interrelated parts), changes in a way of life involve more than just *physical* changes, however—e.g., changes in the geographic distribution of the society's population. As one of the last century's most brilliant writers—Raymond Williams—pointed out in *The Long Revolution* (1961), changes in the nature of a society tend to have an impact on how we *think* about our society—and society *per se*; and what I would add to this insight as that the changes in thinking incident upon societal change can act as an *obstacle* to *planned* societal change, in a direction deemed advisable.

In developing this point, let me begin with a rather long quotation from Williams's *Long Revolution* (p. 124). Williams observed that with "the rise of economic individualism"

> instead of thinking of society as an established order, you think of it, essentially, as a market. That it is, of course (in the image) a free market involves radical dissent from any rigid, prescriptive establishment: in this sense it continually overlaps with the kind of democratic spirit which accompanied it. But the most important effect, ultimately, is that a new element in the whole organization is selected as central. You do not now start from the King or the established social order: you start from the activities of production and trading, and increasingly these are seen as the essential purposes of the society, in terms of which other activities must submit to be judged. All forms of human organization, from the family and the community to the educational system, must be reshaped in the light of this dominant economic activity. At the same time, since it was the free economic activity of individuals that was at first emphasized, the whole idea of social purpose underwent radical change. Where the former purpose had been the maintenance of an established order, and thus in these prescribed terms positive, the new purpose was at first largely negative: society existed to create conditions in which the free economic enterprise of individuals was not hampered. Society provided a market, and kept it free. Later, however, the image was more fully developed. With the further development of capitalism, to its corporate stage, society was no longer thought of as merely providing a market: the organization of society itself was essentially a market organization. Whereas, in starting from an established order, the idea of the individual was essentially comprised in 'my station and its duties', the idea of the individual in a market society was, first, the responsible free agent, and, later, the man with something to sell. Obligation and service had been challenged by freedom and responsibility, but then, in the final image, buying and selling became terms in which all human activity could be assessed.

That is, with the rise to dominance of a market economy, economic activities came to be perceived as the very *purpose* of the society, and with that shift in thinking it became "obvious" that the society's other institutions—such as the family and the educational system--"must" adapt

to that purpose, which adaptations then occurred. Whereas initially the society's function was thought of as merely *providing* a market, as capitalism developed further, added Williams, the society came to be thought of as *itself* a market organization, so that "buying and selling became terms in which *all* human activity could be assessed."

Owen Hatherley recently reported, in *The Guardia*n, on some empirical research done at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), on vocabulary changes over the past 200 years:

> According to a report by researchers at the University of California Los Angeles, English has become a peculiarly capitalist language–though they don't quite put it like that. They used the somewhat blunt instrument of feeding 1.5m English-language books into Ngram Viewer, a tool that catalogues phrase usage, in order to count the frequency that words were used. The results proved that over the last 200 years there has been an ever-increasing use of particularly acquisitive words: "get", "unique", "individual", "self", "choose"; while over the same period "give" and "obliged" decreased.

Hatherley notes that "For the researchers, this shows the results of the English-speaking countries moving from ;a predominantly rural, low-tech society to a predominantly urban, hi-tech society'". Hatherley, however, being obviously more educated than these UCLA researchers (!), and familiar with Williams's writings, adds that "English had become a class language, where loaded words (and, as he [Williams] often pointed out, pronunciations) were accepted as 'standard'". Hatherley then quotes from a later book by Williams (*Communications*, 1962): "it becomes increasingly obvious that society is not controlling its economic life, but is in part being controlled by it."

Now if *words* with an acquisitive connotation have grown in frequency of usage over the past 200 years (the UCLA finding), the implication—discussed in detail by Raymond Williams—is that *thinking* has as well. And if *that's* the case, the suggestion is that acquisitive thinking has become *pervasive* in our (ostensibly "Christian"!) society.

By "pervasive" I do not mean that *everyone* in our society is "possessed" by acquisitive thinking, but that our "leaders"—in government and business—are controlled by such thinking, as are many others as well (who thereby have what Karl Marx called "false consciousness").

What hope is there, then, that the global warming problem will be faced, by the citizens of the United States, in any meaningful way?! Is not the dominance of acquisitive thinking in our society such a serious *obstacle* that there is no reason to believe that we will extricate ourselves from the global warming crisis that faces us? [1] (These are rhetorical questions, by the way!)

Despite the fact that I regard the above questions as rhetorical ones, the fact that at least *some* in our society have been largely able to escape the clutches of our vocabulary, and the sort of

thinking that it promotes, gives me some slight measure of hope. It is, however, a hope that is difficult to maintain, I'll admit!

Endnote

1. I recently encountered this astute statement: "The very fact that we have a word for 'nature' is evidence that we do not regard ourselves as part of it. Indeed, our separation from it is a myth integral to the triumph of our civilisation. We are, we tell ourselves, the only species ever to have attacked nature and won." This statement occurs in *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto* (2009). A recent article states this: "This weekend the Sustainability Center in Hampshire [England] will be home to Uncivilization 2013, which describes itself as 'a gathering of people searching for answers to questions about our collective future in a rapidly changing and depleting world'. At Uncivilization about 400 people are expected to attend sessions including a wild-food foraging workshop, a talk on moving beyond a monetary-based economy, and a ceremony of singers and storytellers leading the group in a 'liturgy of loss'."

   In my previous essay ("Is Being "Green" Enough?") I referred to myself as having grown up in Nature, and I now regret that fact; a better phrasing might have been to say that I grew up sensing that I was a part *of* Earth System, not apart *from* it.

Responding to Rohrabacher and Hayes

Alton C. Thompson

Host Chris Hayes (on the MSNBC television network) has recently presented this quote by Congressman Dana Rohrabacher (Republican from California):

> global warming is a total fraud. The federal government, they want to create global government to control all of our lives. That's what their game plan is. It's step by step by step more and bigger control over our lives by higher levels of government. And global warming is simply that strategy in spades.
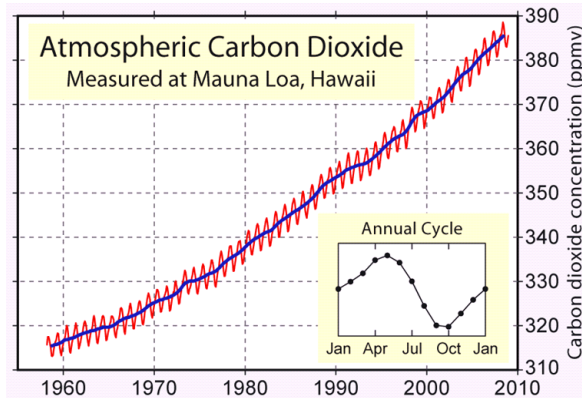
Chris Hayes has rephrased this to read:

> If global warming is real, then the government would need to intervene to fix it, but we don't like government intervention. Therefore, global warming cannot be real.

I, however, would rephrase it in this manner:

> Scientists claim that global warming is occurring, but it's *not*. Rather, scientists in making this claim are acting—whether they are *aware* of it or not—as tools of the national government. The national government wants to control our lives, and is using scientists' claim that global warming is occurring to convince the *populace* that it is, thereby making it easier for the government to gain control over our lives.

My response to Rohrabacher (as rephrased above) would be the following:

1. You suggest that the claim that global warming is an unsubstantiated claim, but you provide no substantiation for your *own* claim that global warming is *not* occurring. Why, then, should anyone accept *your* claim?!

2. Beginning in 1958, the late Charles D. Keeling began measuring the carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere at the Mauna Loa Observatory (Hawaii). For the period 1960 – 2010, these results were obtained (on the left):

Do you question these results? If so, on what basis?

3. The atmosphere of the earth acts as "greenhouse glass" in that it allows short-wave energy from the sun to pass through it, but when those rays strike earth and are absorbed at a given location (because of the "albedo" being low there), they heat the earth at that location, which then re-radiates long-wave energy into the atmosphere. Some of that heat is "trapped" by the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere—so that the atmosphere itself is heated. Th*e level* of presence of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere prior to, say, 1750, was a virtual constant over time, and such as to enable life—including *human* life—to occur on earth.

   Do you concur with the above statements? If not, *why* not?

4. As the graph under point 2 above indicates, the concentration of carbon dioxide—the principal greenhouse gas in the atmosphere—has been increasing at least since 1960. Given that this means that more and more heat energy has been "trapped" in the atmosphere since 1960, it follows that a gradual heating of the atmosphere *must* have occurred. In fact, actual *measurements* bear this out.

   If you doubt this, what is the *basis* for your doubt?

Mr. Rohrabacher, if you are not able to supply a convincing rebuttal to the above points, we have no reason to accept your basic claim—that global warming is *not* occurring. And if you are unable to rebut the above points, we must conclude that global warming *is*, in fact, occurring—so that there is no need to address the other claims that you have made (in my rephrasing, that is) relative to global warming.

Despite that fact, let me comment briefly on those other claims anyway:

- I know of no evidence that climate scientists—or other scientists, for that matter—are either advertent or inadvertent tools of our national government. It's true that for many of them, their research is government-funded, but I believe that most scientists have enough integrity that they will not "fudge" the results of their research. Scientists may "dream up" additional research projects so that they can continue to receive governmental support, and thereby engage in rather trivial research (what is, and is not, "trivial" is, of course, a matter of judgment). And although such projects may be questioned as to their worth, giving one at least *some* reason to question the integrity of the researchers involved, the results of trivial research are not, of necessity, "fudged." In addition, scientists can be criticized for the narrowness of their research interests, but narrowness in focus—although unfortunate—is a virtual necessity imposed on scientists by the very nature of science as it is practiced today.

- Insofar as government has been gaining increasing control over our lives—which claim *does*, in fact, have merit, as the recent Edward Snowden revelations demonstrate—the

more *basic* problem here is that our society has come over corporate control. As Noam Chomsky put it, in a [recent speech](#):

> According to received doctrine, we live in capitalist democracies, which are the best possible system, despite some flaws. There's been an interesting debate over the years about the relation between capitalism and democracy, for example, are they even compatible? I won't be pursuing this because I'd like to discuss a different system—what we could call the "really existing capitalist democracy", RECD for short, pronounced "wrecked" by accident. [!]
>
> <div align="center">*   *   *</div>
>
> [A major problem that we face today is] environmental catastrophe. That should be obvious. Certainly the scale of the danger should be obvious to anyone with eyes open, anyone who is literate, particularly those who read scientific journals. Every issue of a technical journal virtually has more dire warnings than the last one.
>
> There are various reactions to this around the world. There are some who seek to act decisively to prevent possible catastrophe. At the other extreme, major efforts are underway to accelerate the danger. Leading the effort to intensify the likely disaster is the richest and most powerful country in world history, with incomparable advantages and the most prominent example of RECD—the one that others are striving towards.

And as Chomsky knows full well, our government is serving the interests of the (fossil fuel) energy companies, Wall Street, other major corporations, and the rich. Thus, if the national government is gaining increasing control over our lives, the corporate elite and the wealthy are gaining control over the national government—so that it is *that* group that is the real "[enemy of the people](#)."

Chris Hayes's interpretation of what you (Cong. Rorhabacher) had said is that global warming can't be real because if global warming *i*s occurring, (a) governmental action would be required to fix the problem, (b) I and others don't like governmental "interference," therefore (c) global warming can't be occurring. I have two responses to this interpretation of what Cong. Rorhabacher said:

- Chris, I don't see how you derive this interpretation from the Congressman's remark.

- The belief, which you are attributing to the Congressman, that it would take the national government to "fix" the problem of global warming—*if*, that is, global warming were occurring—is highly questionable. Given the strong influence that the fossil fuel companies have on our national government, it's not likely that the national government

will do anything significant to "fight" global warming—despite Pres. O'Bomber's recent contrary statements.

Perhaps, Chris, you would be able to explain to me how you got from Rohrabacher's statement to your summary of it, but if so, I would like to see it.

As to the belief—held by anyone, whether on the "right" or "left"—that the problem of global warming "must" be addressed by our national government—because it alone is charged with "promoting the general welfare," etc.—my response is that it may have that legal *responsibility*, but it does not follow from that fact that it will *act* on that responsibility. In fact, as I suggested above, such acting is *improbable*—which fact is a serious one that needs to be recognized by those of us who are convinced that (a) global warming is occurring, and (b) represents an extremely serious threat to our future well-being, and even survival.

What the above conclusions suggest is that we must "take matters into our own hands" which, given the inevitability of a "tipping point" being reached and crossed, means that we—acting as individuals, and as individuals who are members of small groups—must strive to adapt as well as we can to the changes that will be inevitably occurring within the next few decades—changes, for that matter, that are *alread*y occurring!

Civilization as a Pathological Development

Alton C. Thompson

The word "civilization" has acquired positive connotations over time, tricking us into *believing* that civilization *is*, in fact, a "good thing." The position taken here, however, is that the development of civilization—in *most* of its manifestations, at least—has had pathological consequences, both for its various *individual* "inmates" (but in different ways—depending, e.g., on one's "position" in the society), and for our *species*. *How* it has been pathological is a matter that I have touched on in many previous essays on this site, and will comment on further in future essays. In this essay, however, my focus is on identifying what I regard as key "events" in civilization's development—humankind's "worst mistake."

In fulfilling that goal my aim is to not be "merely" academic but, rather, to produce a "picture" that might prove *useful* as a "lever"—for effectuating change in a direction more truly positive. Contrary to what the title of Chellis Glendinning's book [1] suggests, *my* interest is not in "recovering" from Western Civilization but, rather, doing what I can to contribute to the continued survival of our species, *all* of whose members having the highest possible level of well-being consistent with what is ecologically possible.

What specifically prompted the current essay is my recent discovery of the Dark Mountain Project, and the "Manifesto" that it produced in 2009. Their "Uncivilization 2013" festival began in Hampshire, England, on August 15 and concludes tomorrow (August 19), but I did not attend—in part because of my learning about it too late, but primarily because flying to England is not in my budget. I have, however, had an opportunity to *read* their "Manifesto," and the current essay can be perceived as an acceptance, on my part, of their invitation in that work:

> Uncivilisation, like civilisation, is not something that can be created alone. Climbing the Dark Mountain cannot be a solitary exercise. We need bearers, sherpas, guides, fellow adventurers. We need to rope ourselves together for safety. At present, our form is loose and nebulous. It will firm itself up as we climb. Like the best writing, we need to be shaped by the ground beneath our feet, and what we become will be shaped, at least in part, by what we find on our journey.
>
> If you would like to climb at least some of the way with us, we would like to hear from you. We feel sure there are others out there who would relish joining us on this expedition.

In identifying "key 'events' in civilization's development" in an essay rather than an eBook, my presentation will, of necessity, be both brief and superficial—and even tentative. Because my primary interest here is in identifying possible "levers" for bringing about societal system

change, and I can accomplish that goal (to my *current* satisfaction, at least) by writing an essay rather than an eBook, that's what I have chosen to do. It goes without saying that I am not attempting to provide any *definitive* discussion of civilization's development, my goal being only to identify and briefly discuss the "high points" of that development—by which I mean those developments that seem to have played a *critical* role in civilization's development, my orientation being solely to *Western* civilization.

*   *   *

My starting point here is the *specietal* claim that we humans are "children of the Ice Age" [2]. The modern Ice Age altered conditions in Africa to the point that our ancestor, *Australopithecus*, was forced out of the trees, with those members of that *genus* who were best adapted—physically and sociologically—to the new environment being the ones who survived, produced progeny, and eventuated in us modern humans. Given that descent from the trees resulted in exposure to dangerous predators, adapting to the presence of predators was one—and an important [3]—"dimension" of this adaptation.

Although "natural selection," as defined by Charles Darwin [4], played no role whatsoever in human evolution (!), "sexual selection" did.[5] Given the presence of "harems" (and "plural marriage" [6]) in some parts of the world, at various times, it may be difficult for many to believe that *female*-dominated groups were important in our evolution as humans—but they were (so get over it!).

Our *direct* ancestors were foragers—or gatherer-hunters [7]—whose biology had developed with reference to the activities that were necessary for their survival. The development of the human brain, however, was such that—in conjunction with certain *physical* developments—permitted humans to develop means of communication one with another—signals initially, actual (oral) languages later. And as the brain had developed in the first place as an aid in survival, it is not surprising that the brain's development also aided this process of language development—and also had implications for the development of "innovations" that would make foraging activity more efficient. Presumably, such innovations occurred with both hunting and gathering, but it was an innovation that occurred with (female) *gatherers* that was to prove especially significant.

That innovation was the development of agriculture—which likely began with the harvesting of wild grains, with the sprouting of a few seeds inadvertently dropped being noticed by these gatherers, it being concluded by them that the plants in question had grown from seeds dropped accidentally—with *that* conclusion leading to the idea of *deliberately* "planting" seeds. What was beginning to happen, then, was the birth of the Agricultural Revolution.

This was not a "revolution" in the sense that it involved a rapid change in way of living—for it developed over a period of several centuries. It *was*, however, a "revolution" in the sense that it (a) eventuated in a rather *different* way of life, and (b) the "seeds were sown" for continual *changes* in way of life—changes that initially were so small as to be perceptible only to

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historians, but changes which began accelerating with the Industrial Revolution much later (beginning around 1750 CE).

The changeover to a way of life based on agriculture (with crop growing preceding animal tending) involved, for everyone in a society:

- Changes in the *stimuli* to which one was exposed.

- Changes in the *kinds* of behaviors in which one engaged, and the amount of *time* spent engaging in different behaviors.

- Changes in how one used one's brain. As a gatherer or hunter one's mind tended to be absorbed in one's surround, with particularistic knowledge, and low-level generalizations, being gained/formulated with reference to the "touchable" surround, and mythological thinking developing with reference to the observable, but non-touchable, surround (e.g., sun, moon, stars, lightning). As a member of a society that was becoming an agriculturally-based one, the fact that *social differentiation* was occurring in such societies meant, however, that how one *used* one's brain depended on one's "placement" in the new Social Order that was developing.

(I argue in my *What Are Churches* For? (Chapters 2 – 4) that during the gatherer-hunter phase of Western history, humans developed certain "design specifications" relative to stimuli, behaviors, etc., and that the shift to an agriculture-based—and now sedentary—existence represented a *violation* of those "specifications," the ultimate result being virtually all of the problems we humans have faced through history, and now face. Such an assertion is, of course, a rather abstract one that needs to be "fleshed out"—which I do to some extent in the ensuing discussion.)

As social differentiation was occurring, so was the *geographical distribution* of the population changing, with urban centers arising, and members of the "upper" class becoming associated, residentially, with those urban centers. In addition, the small gatherer-hunter *band* was increasingly becoming a "civilized" *society* with a relatively much larger population. What those of us who now live in such societies have been *taught* to believe about them is that they represent the apex of human development—with the various "goodies" present in a civilized society being offered as proof in *support* of this claim. And although it is virtually impossible to conclude that civilized existence offers *nothing* of value (such as the computer that I'm using to type this!), this fact should not blind us into accepting the belief that civilization *only* offers "goodies."

I agree with geographer Warren Johnson, who has stated: "The Biblical legend of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden seems clearly to describe the invention of agriculture." [8] That is, the garden in the story alludes to gather-hunter existence (or perhaps to pastoral nomadism, a way of

life that *also* developed during this Revolution), and the expulsion from that garden was the "Fall" into agriculture—this "Fall" being utterly misinterpreted by the theologically-minded.

The growing *physical* separation of members of the "elite" from the physical environment (as a result of their urban living, attention given to ruling, entertainment, etc.) caused them to be increasingly *intellectually* separated from that environment—i.e., they were increasingly thinking of themselves as *separate from*—somehow "above"—the ecosystem. And the fact that they were developing a *control mentality* with reference to their subjects had as a corollary the development of such a mentality with reference to the physical environment. Increasingly, for them, was the earth not appreciated for esthetic or spiritual reasons, and regarded with a sense of awe, wonder, and mystery; rather, increasingly was it thought of by them in purely *utilitarian* terms.

Put another way, increasingly did the "elite" become *parasitic*—both with reference to their subjects (who, virtually by definition, were becoming "hosts" for these parasites), and to the physical environment itself. Although the elite's developing (parasitic) stance, relative to the physical environment did not begin to have significant implications until much later (although "significant" itself is subject to varying interpretations [9]), that stance relative to *subjects* did— both in terms everyday exploitation and "recruitment" for its "war games."

Because I don't want to get "bogged down" in a lengthy essay here, I will next identify very briefly a series of developments, all of which have had pathological implications—for either particular individuals, for our species, or for both—although I will not be detailing here those pathological implications. What's ironic in the ensuing presentation is the role that I give to religion as a negative force (!):

- The development (with the early Hebrews) of *monotheism* [10] involved not just thinking of "god" in singular rather than plural terms (i.e., *polytheism*), but involved thinking of "god" as transcendent—i.e., "out there"—rather than immanent. This fact brings to mind a statement by Gregory Bateson (Steps to an Ecology of Mind, 1972 p. 468):

  > If you put God outside and set him vis-à-vis his creation and if you have the idea that you are created in his image, you will logically and naturally see yourself as outside and against the things around you. And as you arrogate all mind to yourself, you will see the world around you as mindless and therefore not entitled to moral or ethical consideration. The environment will seem to be yours to exploit. Your survival unit will be you and your folks or conspecifics against the environment of other social units, other races and the brutes and the vegetables.

  > If this is your estimate of your relation to nature *and you have an advanced technology*, your likelihood of survival will be that of a snowball in hell. You will die either of the toxic by-products of your own hate, or simply, of overpopulation and overgrazing. The raw materials of the world are finite.

What a prophetic statement!

- The following has been said of one of the books authored by the late (died 1980) Marshall McLuhan:

  > McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (written in 1961, first published in Canada by University of Toronto Press in 1962) is a pioneering study in the fields of oral culture, print culture, cultural studies, and media ecology.
  >
  > Throughout the book, McLuhan takes pains to reveal how communication technology (alphabetic writing, the printing press, and the electronic media) affects cognitive organization, which in turn has profound ramifications for social organization:

  That is, the technology that has been developed related to communication has had implications for thought processes and, in turn, social organization.

  Related to this, Eugene Linden [11] has asserted that the "development of Western civilization was the product of a linguistic accident, an accident that Chinese culture, with its strong, integrated, and successful relationship to the world, did not find useful." Linden explains:

  > the language of the West permits the description of a world having enduring qualities separate from the act of perception, while the world of the Chinese ideogram does not. For [Ezra] Pound and [Ernest] Fenollosa [in their *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*], this property of Romance and Germanic languages, which abstracted the locator from the world, weakened poetic effect. It shifted the focus of communication from the undifferentiated appreciation and evocation of a particular event to the presentation of a denatured scheme of the event, organized by this abstract filter.
  >
  >   *   *   *
  >
  > While this change might sap some vigor from poetic discourse, it permitted the West to take a posture toward nature in which technology and science might flourish.

- A feature associated with the development of Christianity is that of a *temporal* distance being created between hurtful deeds and their punishment—in that the *punishment* for hurtful deeds committed in the *present* was pushed into the distant *future*—to a supposed afterlife. Rather than the promise of a very warm life with Satan in an (*un*)"sweet bye and bye" resulting in a *deterrent* of hurtful behavior, it tended to do the *opposite*, however!

- The "Protestant Reformation" helped further in breaking whatever communal bonds connected one person to another. Although the statements of Martin Luther and John Calvin may not have had this *intention*, the *results* of their statements (e.g., regarding a

"calling") were to (a) promote a *self*-orientation (i.e., selfishness) and (b) encourage entrepreneurial activity, with the fruits of such efforts going to the owner(s)—and with *employees* being exploited. Linden (*op. cit*., p. 106) has noted the irony of this: "The Reformation directed man's gaze heavenward in order that he might be more effective worldly." (!)

- The growing tendency to think of oneself as *apart from* Nature (rather than a *part of* it) encouraged the development of scientific thought, and such development made various technological developments possible, which—in conjunction with the development of an entrepreneurial spirit—resulted in the introduction of more and more different *things* on the "market." Once such a process began, ideas tended to be generated as to how to "improve" a given product, so that *this* fact, in conjunction with the fact of a growing demand for the "new" (so that one can differentiate oneself from others who possess the "old") meant that new items began to continually enter the "market"—with production *itself* becoming increasingly efficient as new technologies were introduced in the production process. As these development were occurring, societies were becoming increasingly urbanized (with rural areas being depopulated)—and the existing class system was intensified.

- The emergence of Adam Smith's "invisible hand" concept—with its assertion that selfish behavior "magically" has the effect of promoting the common good (!), because it provided a *rationale* for selfish behavior, enabled people to pursue selfishness with a clear conscience—tricking themselves into believing that the best way to help *others* (a fundamental principle of Christianity) was to help *oneself*. (!)

- Charles Darwin's introduction of the concept of "natural selection" (which he used to "explain" monotypic change in a hypothetical situation [wow!]) came to be used in the "philosophy" of Social Darwinism—which abandoned Smith's assertion that individual *selfishness* is good for the society in favor of the assertion that the class structure of a society reflects *differential ability* in the society—with "height" in the societal hierarchy being a function of "fitness" (for some defined in *biological* terms, with others bringing in "free will"—e.g., *choosing* laziness). Social Darwinism enabled members of the elite to exploit others in good conscience, and if accepted as "true" by those being exploited, helped keep them in their "place."

- Introduction of the myth of "equality of opportunity" helped keep people in their "place" in the society by convincing them that their lack of "success" was a function of their own shortcomings. One *convinced* of the proposition that equality of opportunity existed in the society would tend, then, to *accept* his/her "place" in the society—and not be disruptive (including by accomplishing suicide).

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- Diversions (e.g., sports, movies, television) introduced by the elite not only became a source of income for them, but served to turn the attention of "lowers" away from the workings of the society—so that they would tend not to *notice* (even though they might vaguely *sense*) that they were being exploited. (Ironically, the elite also developed diversions for *itself*—"high" culture, horse racing, polo, yachting, etc.—which enabled it to engage in activities that impact others and the environment negatively, but do so with a clear conscience.)

- "Mind control" through control of the media involved--and involves—*not* educating the public as to the workings of the society and/or also *mis*informing them—providing them with an abundance of "filler" instead. This helps in keeping members of the public but dimly aware of their being exploited.

- As the productive capacity of the society increases, and it enters a "Little King" phase, to stimulate the demand necessary to "handle" the increased productive capacity, advertising becomes a major industry, and the individual graduates to the status of "consumer"—with *consumption itself* now becoming a diversion, and peoples' minds "messed with" (the probable result of the latter being that many people cannot now think clearly about anything!). Not only does consumption become a diversion, but the necessity of continual *spending* in one's role as a consumer tends to put one in a position such that one is "trapped" by the system, without any clear escape route. Put another way, one is made a virtual *slave* of the system.

- The situation in what would become the United States was an ideal setting for the above tendencies to "flower": Many of the early settlers were religious dissidents and other malcontents, moving into an area already occupied, but by "inferior" creatures (i.e., Native Americans); they were people who were predisposed (Linden, *op. cit.*, p. 109) "to restlessness and experimentation and an ingrained distrust of tradition." "Unlike the aborigines they encountered on arrival [he continued], the colonists had no conception that nature had any purpose other than to provide food and materials for man." Because of these "qualities" (!), they were blinded from perceiving what they were doing to each other—and to Mother Earth.

More points could undoubtedly be added to this list, but my purpose here is not to be *exhaustive* but to be *suggestive*—and to identify factors that might be *helpful* for effectuating societal system change—in the United States, at least.

* * *

What I have attempted in this essay is to attempt to identify some of (what *I* perceive to be) the major developments, during the past few millennia, having pathological implications—for

certain *types* of individuals, and for our species—without, however, being very specific about the *nature* of those implications. In future essays I will attempt to correct this deficiency, to a degree at least. In concluding the present essay I would like to make a few comments relative to "escaping" from civilized existence in favor of a "better model."

Just as Morris Berman, in his recent (2011) [Why America Failed: The Roots of Imperial Decline](#), seemingly suggests that civilized societies today are on the verge of collapse, that this is inevitable, and there is little that can be done about this possibility, so did Linden, in 1979, seem to suggest the same thing. Linden *claimed* (p. 174) that people were searching for a leader who could *justify*, to the populace, the current reality or who could at least point to where people could direct their anger. But just as I see little point in simply waiting for the "inevitable," I am certainly not looking for a leader in Linden's sense. What I am looking for, rather, is a leader *capable* of "leading us out of the wilderness who proceeds to actually *do* so. Not that "salvation" is possible for *everyone*—for I agree with those climate scientists who believe that global warming will "cull" most of the world's population before the century is out. But given my "faith" that at least *some* people will be able to survive the ravages that global warming is likely to be inflicting on us humans, and my belief that this will only be possible if the "right" leader appears on the scene, I have some measure of "faith" that such a leader will arise in our midst.

In a sense, Linden "redeems" himself by stating, a little later in his book, that (p. 176) "the only real threat to the American economy is self-sufficiency." In fact, 29 years ago this insightful statement motivated me to write, and have published, "[Ecotopia: A 'Gerendipitous' Scenario](#)." In that article I presented a 5-"wave" scenario/strategy for societal system change, and I continue to believe in the soundness of the "program" therein presented. The principal addition that I would make now to that article is that the eco-communities built as a part of that program should be designed—as to *where* they should be created, and *how* they should be built—with global warming and "human design specifications" (alluded to earlier in this essay) in mind.

The question that remains in my mind is: How to *implement*, or *get* implemented, such a program? I have no definitive answer to that question at present, but intend to *continue* to struggle with it.

Endnotes

1. [My Name is Chellis and I'm in Recovery From Western Civilization](#). Boston: Shambhala, 1999.

2. Steven M. Stanley, [Children of the Ice Age: How a Global Catastrophe Allowed Humans to Evolve](#). New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1996, 1998.

3. Donna Hart and Robert W. Sussman, [Man the Hunted: Primates, Predators, and Human Evolution](#). New York: Westview Press, 2005.

4. See Chapter 8 in my [Ringing the Bell for Darwin](#) (2012).

5. See pp. 163 – 167, and 269 – 272, in Nancy Makepeace Tanner*, On Becoming Human*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

6. See, e.g., Jon Krackauer's discussion of Mormonism, and the 200+ sects of "Fundamentalist Mormonism," that have emerged from Mormonism in *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*. New York: Double day, a division of Random House, 2003. Recently, a friend and I traveled from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to Nauvoo, Illinois, where Joseph Smith and many of his followers were living at the time of Smith's murder by a mob. After Smith's murder, several factions developed, with the group that followed Brigham Young to Utah being the one with the most members today. After the departure of the Mormons from Nauvoo, a group of "Icarians" led by Étienne Cabet acquired the property, and became the longest-lived *secular* communitarian group in United States history—the Shakers being the longest-lived religious such group. (While we were living in Cincinnati, Ohio, my wife and I had an opportunity to visit the restored Pleasant Hill Shaker community in Kentucky, to the immediate south.)

7. Year ago I read a book by Richard Leakey (I don't recall the title) that pointed out that because, with our ancestors, gathering tended to be done by females, and hunting by males, with, however, women's gathering providing the most food for our ancestors, "gather-hunter" is preferable to the (male chauvinist!) "hunter-gatherer." I should perhaps add here that Hugh Brody's *The Other Side of Eden* (2001) provides an excellent discussion of what it *means* to be a hunter, as compared with a farmer.

8. *Muddling Toward Frugality*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1979, p. 43.

9. Jared Diamond's recent *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking, 2005) evinces a concept of "significant" that is valid (i.e., *societal* collapse), but I prefer to think of "significant" as "that which threatens the very continuation of our species."

10. The Hebrew Bible contains numerous references to "desert," which fact suggests that the writers and compilers of that collection of books had a pastoral nomadic past. Given that for pastoral nomads the sun is the dominant element of the environment, and the fact that such groups tend to be patriarchal, it is not surprising that monotheism would develop with such groups.

11. *Affluence and Discontent: The Anatomy of Consumer Societies*. A Seaver Book. New York: The Viking Press, 1979, p. 92 and p. 91.

Loving God and Neighbor

Alton C. Thompson

Jesus is quoted in John's gospel as saying (13:34, and also 15: 12, 17), to his disciples (after Judas had left their presence) "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (Also, Paul of Tarsus, in his letter to the Galatians, had written (5:13, 14) "serve one another humbly in love. **14** For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself.")

In Matthew's gospel, however, related words attributed to Jesus are (22:38 - 40) are "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' **38** This is the first and greatest commandment. **39** And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' **40** All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (The *first* phrase quoted, by Jesus, within the statement attributed above to Jesus is a variation of Deuteronomy 6:5, in which heart, soul, and strength are mentioned; the *second* phrase quoted by Jesus here is quoted from Leviticus 19:18.)

In Luke 10:27 Jesus is quoted as saying "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Thus, the passage in Luke is identical to the one in Matthew, except that Luke added "strength" to the list in Matthew; and although both passages quote from Leviticus accurately, Matthew *substitutes* "mind" for the "strength" in Deuteronomy 6:5, and Luke *adds* "mind" to the list given in Deuteronomy.

What I wish to focus on here, however—initially, at least—is the passage in *John*. Two facts can be noted regarding that passage:

- The claim that the writer makes that Jesus said that he was introducing a "new" commandment ("love one another"), was clearly a misstatement—for the "love your neighbor as yourself" of Leviticus—which expresses the same basic concept—was written centuries earlier than the passage in John. That is, the claim in John's gospel that Jesus was saying something "new" makes Jesus appear ignorant of Hebrew Scripture, *thereby* demonstrating the ignorance of the writer of John regarding that Scripture.

- Although this gospel is believed to have been written after both Matthew and Luke, it excludes the "love of God" portion of those two gospels. Instead, Jesus is made to say in that gospel that (3:16, 17) that **16** "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through

him." That is, the *direction* of love is *turned around* here; rather than us loving *God*, we are told that God loves *us*—a totally different message.

The gospel of John, then, is a rather strange book when compared with Matthew and Luke, in at least two respects:

- It has Jesus state, erroneously, that the "love one another" commandment is "new." (There was nothing "new" about it, for it is simply a restatement of Leviticus 19:18. The writer of Luke's gospel not only *quoted* the Leviticus passage accurately, but told the famous "Good Samaritan" parable to *illustrate* the commandment.)

- Rather than referring to an obligation to love *God* (a commandment having its basis in Deuteronomy 6:5), it turns that commandment "on its head" by asserting that God loves *us*.

I started this essay by quoting from John's gospel to allow me to arrive at a more *accurate*, seemingly, rendition of what Jesus might have said—my judgment of "accuracy" here being based in the fact that the Matthew and Luke passages both have a basis in Hebrew Scripture, whereas the version found in John's gospel does not.

That conclusion allows me to ask: *If we take the love of God and neighbor commandments as authentic commandments given by Jesus (being simply repetitions of what is stated in Hebrew Scripture), and are also convinced that these two commandments should be (as Jesus is said to have declared) the* **central** *commandments that should guide our lives in the twenty-first century, what do we need to do to ensure that we will follow those two commandments to the best of our abilities?*

Before proceeding with an answer to this question, two points need to be made:

- Simply giving one's *intellectual assent* to these commandments is no guarantee that one will be able to actually *live* by them—most of the time, that is. (Trust me! I am 73 years old, and know this only too well!)

- A part of the reason for this—but *only* a part—is that the concept of God that seemingly prevailed in Jesus's day—as a person-like *Being*, such that Jesus was able to refer to God as "Father" (as in, e.g., the "Lord's Prayer," given in Matthew 6:9 – 13 and Luke 11:2 – 4), the first of these two passages referring to a "Father in Heaven," the second simply referring to "Father"—is a concept that is simply unacceptable to many moderns, those who are educated in particular.

Ironically, the much older concept of God found in Hebrew Scripture—"I AM that I AM"—found in this Exodus 3: 14, 15 passage:

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¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.'

"This is my name forever,
　the name you shall call me
　from generation to generation.

is far more acceptable to the educated modern, for it asserts that there is [Mystery](#) in the world that we humans will never fully comprehend, and that although this Mystery is intangible, it is real.

Given the two points above—that giving intellectual assent to the two commandments does not guarantee that one will *follow* them "faithfully," and the current need for an "acceptable" (to the modern educated mind) concept of God—the question arises: *Is there a solution to these two problems?*

My answer is a definite "Yes," in that I believe that the New Word Fellowship (NeWF) discussed in Sections 6 and 7 of my *[A Religion for Today](#)* solves both of the above-mentioned problems:

- An assumption that underlies the NeWF, as an institution, is that simply *giving* people commands, and then expecting to *follow* those commands is foolish—because it is an approach that obviously doesn't work (just look at the history of the supposedly "Christian" country, the United States!). Granted that *one* important reason why people who know the love of God and neighbor commands—and give their intellectual assent to them—don't follow them well is that *societal pressures* make that difficult.

  I recognize this as a problem, but believe that because (I assume that) NeWF participation is contingent upon (a) accepting, as a principle, that one wishes to put God at the center of one's life (with a lit candle placed at the center of the circle, participants assumed to seated in a circle) and (b) NeWF participation will often result in one or more members of a given "circle" experiencing a "natural high" (which might be interpreted as "Spirit-filling"—see [John 14:26](#), [15:26](#), [16:7](#), [16:13](#)), and that (c) such a state of mind will result in *insights* being gained by members of he group.

  Given that one can conceive these insights as "revelations" whose origin is *God*, the fact that one is likely to be *excited* about these revelations is likely to "feed" a love for God. One's reading (of newspapers, magazines, books, etc.), viewing of television, personal experiences will, of course, form the "raw material" from which revelations arise. But it

is the *experience* of NeWF participation that is the *catalyst* for those "raw materials" resulting in revelations—leading to a love for God.

- In discussing the manifold possible consequences of NeWF participation for participants, I argue that the *controlled* nature of discussion during a given NeWF session will enable a variety of viewpoints being not only *expressed*, but *welcomed*—without any fear that one will be "shot down" by others in the group for expressing views with which some (even all) others in the group may disagree. When one initially hears a viewpoint with which one disagrees, one may very well harbor a feeling of disdain, even hatred, for the person expressing such views. However, given that discussion is controlled by certain rules accepted by all participants, one is likely to find that one for whom one initially harbored negative feelings comes to be first *tolerated*, then *liked*, and eventually even *loved* by oneself.

  This love that one develops for other members of the group, combined with the continuation of a "natural high" (for a time at least, with the next session resulting in a "recharging of one's batteries"), is likely to result in a loving *attitude*, resulting in loving *behavior*, expressed toward *all whom one meets* (or even just *learns* about by, e.g., watching television). Not only can this be regarded as a good in itself, but the *state of mind* that can result from NeWF participation can help one cope with one's everyday life—so that factors that *previously* hindered one from following the "love of neighbor" command now lose their force. Perhaps not *completely*, but *significantly*.

Given the *varied nature* of the "raw material" that might be the basis for revelations received during a given NeWF session, the revelations received by one group of "NeWFians" need not coincide with the revelations received by other such groups. In fact, each NeWFian group is likely to be unique in its revelations—although an *overlap* in revelations would certainly be expected. Thus, some groups might receive, and act upon, revelations pertaining to how to respond to the global warming threat, others might receive, and act upon, revelations pertaining to local racism, still others might receive, and act upon, revelations pertaining to helping the aged poor in their community, etc., etc.

Rather than thinking—as *some* might do—of this variety as an *unfortunate* tendency, my position is "the more the merrier"! Our world is in a mess (you don't need to be *told* that, do you!), and numerous "hands"—engaged in a great variety of "chores"—should be welcomed, if this world is to be moved in a different—better!—direction.

My hope is not only that there will be a "flowering" of NeWFs, but that at some point *all* NeWFians will accept the statement, in Luke 12:48 that:

> From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

It is past time that more people in our world come to recognize that we—as individuals, as community members, as citizens of some given country, etc.—have been given different "gifts," not for *personal* advancement, but to ensure that *everyone*—throughout the world, in fact!—has her or his needs met—whether physical, sociological, spiritual, or whatever. And that only by people taking this Lukan passage "to heart" will that have a chance of occurring.

In writing this essay, I have written as one who was exposed to the Christian Bible at an early age, and as a person for whom the Bible has been an important part of my life ever since. Note, however, that early one I learned to interpret the Bible in a very *generic* fashion, so that to accept what I stated in this essay, one need not have had a Christian background, a background in any other religion, or even a background in *any* religion, period.

I have two fundamental beliefs:

- Despite the problems associated with Christianity (and other religions), we must not reach the conclusion that we should simply *dispense* with religion.

- What we need to do, rather, is to create a religion that can be accepted by anyone, regardless of one's background.

I propose *NeWFism* as that religion, but am open to other suggestions.

"I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy."

— [Rabindranath Tagore](#)

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Utopia as an Obsolete Concept

Alton C. Thompson

I have just received an email announcement of the recent publication of *Gazing in Useless Wonder: English Utopian Fictions, 1516 – 1800*—adding to the already extensive literature on this *genre* of literature. The literature *of* utopia is also extensive, extending far into the distant past. For example, the earliest utopian "novels"—extremely brief ones, admittedly!—may be these:

Stated negatively (Deuteronomy 28:30):

> You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not even begin to enjoy its fruit.

Stated positively (Isaiah 65:21):

> They will build houses and dwell in them;
>   they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

And also stated positively (Jeremiah 31:5):

> Again you will plant vineyards
>   on the hills of Samaria;
> the farmers will plant them
>   and enjoy their fruit.

This utopia—stated identically in three different passages—expresses the wish of an agricultural people lacking an ability to pursue their simple goal, people who felt no need to elaborate beyond that goal. When societies began to grow in complexity, however, more reasons emerged for questioning the Existing Order, and the writing of utopias was one *genre* used for expressing one's ideas concerning a "better model." For example, a brief summary of Plato's *The Republic* (c.380 BCE) would be:

> Why do men behave justly? Is it because they fear societal punishment? Are they trembling before notions of divine retribution? Do the stronger elements of society scare the weak into submission in the name of law? Or do men behave justly because it is good for them to do so? Is justice, regardless of its rewards and punishments, a good thing in and of itself? How do we define justice? Plato sets out to answer these questions in *The Republic*. He wants to define justice, and to define it in such a way as to show that justice is worthwhile in and of itself. He meets these two challenges with a single solution: a definition of justice that appeals to human psychology, rather than to perceived behavior.

Since that time there have been literally hundreds of utopias written, including Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), which work gave the genre its name, Étienne Cabet's *Travels in Icaria* (1840), Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872), B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two*, and (recently died) Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975). Related to utopian literature is *dystopian literature*, which differs from utopian literature in *projecting* a rather unpleasant future rather than *suggesting* a better one (in the author's judgment).

As I reflected on the title of the book that I recently learned about—*Gazing in Useless Wonder*—it "dawned" on me that utopian literature *per se* is useless! More precisely, it is useless—because of being *obsolete*.

What *makes* it obsolete? As a *genre*, this body of literature involves a given individual developing, and then presenting, a "picture" of a society deemed "better" in various senses by the author. As I reflect on that fact now, that approach strikes me as rather presumptuous.

It occurs to me that I have already—in Chapter 8 of my *What Are Churches* For*?* eBook—presented a better approach than what the utopians have used. Stated simply, how the approach that I advocate differs from that used by utopians is that the latter focus on planning *for*, whereas my approach emphasizes planning *by*.

That is, embedded in the utopian literature is an unconsciously-held (I assume!) arrogance—the conviction that the author knows better than others as to what is "good" for them. What I propose, in contrast—and specifically in the context of a group of individuals creating an eco-community for themselves—is that they themselves plan, and then build (or *have* built for them), a community. Put another way, the future residents of a community should themselves plan the sort of community (i.e., "utopia"!) that they want to live in, and then go ahead and create the community.

The approach that I suggest for this process is the Structured Interaction Group (SIG), but of course those planning a community for themselves are at liberty to choose whatever procedure for planning their community that most appeals to the majority of them.

Those planning a community for themselves might wish to do some reading in the utopian literature for ideas, but I am convinced that if the members of a planning group simply use their existing knowledge and "common sense," and draw upon the expertise of others when a need to do so is felt, they will do just fine.

The Importance of Experiences

Alton C. Thompson

The phrases "an unforgettable experience" and "a memorable experience" imply that some of one's experiences "stick" in one's memory, others do not. Neither phrase suggests, though, that *certain* of one's experiences—whether or not they are "unforgettable," etc.—may *influence* the experiencer in a number of different ways.

The fact of the matter, however, is that experiences can have either (or *both*, in some cases) *positive* or *negative* influences on an individual, which fact will tend to cause one to *seek* those experiences that one believes will have *positive* consequences for oneself, and to *avoid* those experiences that one believes will have *negative* consequences. [1]

The experiences that our gatherer-hunter ancestors had differed [2] from those of the modern "civilized" human in various respects, with the most important difference (it would seem) being that the experiences of our distant ancestors all occurred *outdoors*—for the simple reason that no *indoors* existed for them (except, e.g., caves at certain locations). For us modern "civilized" people, however, there are *both* indoors and outdoors experiences, with the former tending to dominate.

Positive experiences are often associated with a number of our modern indoor activities—such as conversations with others, meals with others, sexual activity, etc. And in Chapter 8 of my *What Are Churches* For*?* eBook, I discussed the manifold benefits that I associate with (indoor) participation in a Structured Interaction Group (SIG).

The fact that we humans *evolved* in the outdoors means, though, that we humans became "designed" for life outdoors, so that spending so much of our time indoors is not only "unnatural" but, in *being* unnatural, is *detrimental* to us in various ways. Ironically, not only does our lack of outdoor experience impact us negatively in various respects; we humans are in the process of *destroying* our Mother. As René Dubos put it in his *So Human an Animal* (1968, p. 188), humankind "is rapidly destroying all the aspects of the environment under which [s/]he evolved as a species and which created his [and her] biological and emotional being."

In brief:

- Our emphasis on *indoors* experience is unnatural, and therefore not good for us, in various respects.

- Although we *need* to spend more time outdoors, much of the outdoors activity that we *do* engage in is directed—whether intentionally or not—at *destroying* the very basis of our existence—with global warming looming large in this picture!

Quite a combination for this (allegedly) most intelligent of all the species!

Of these two points, I have already touched on global warming in many of my previous essays, and so will focus on the *first* point above in this essay. I want especially to make note of the fact that Richard Louv has introduced the concept "nature-deficit disorder" (NDD) to refer to the "disorders" that can be attributed to insufficient exposure to the outdoors. Louv introduced this concept in his 2005 *Last Child in the Woods*, a "book [that] examines research and concludes that direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development and for the physical and emotional health of children and adults". More recently (2012), Louv published *The Nature Principle: Reconnecting With Life in a Virtual Age*, and it is that book that I will discuss in the present essay.

The book discusses research findings and anecdotal evidence in support of his thesis that there is a nature-deficit disorder associated with modern life, along with ecopsychological research and ecotherapy (also known as nature therapy). In fact, Louv's primary concern in this book is not so much to discuss NDD *per se* but, rather, to discuss the *therapeutic use* of Nature—switching back and forth in his book between discussing NDD and therapies for addressing that order. Despite that fact, my focus here will solely be on NDD.

A good point to begin here is with Louv's admission (stated in conjunction with a brief reference to E. O. Wilson's "biophilia" concept) that (p. 53) "at a level we do not fully understand, the human organism needs direct experience with nature"—and without that direct experience we "wither" in various ways. Thus, Louv is "upfront" in admitting that our knowledge of the need for a direct experience with Nature is currently something that is *sensed* rather than *known* with absolute clarity, on the basis of a plethora of scientific studies. Still, Louv believes that enough is known about this matter to justify writing a book on the subject, his *The Nature Principle* being the result.

In discussing the findings (including anecdotal ones) reported by Louv in this book, I find it useful to report those findings under four headings: (a) Physical effects of NDD, (b) attitudinal and mental effects, (c) "other" effects, and (d) behavioral effects. There is nothing sacrosanct about these categories; I use them simply as a way to get a "handle" of sorts on the topic of how a Nature deficit may impact negatively on humans. Under each of the four points I will list some of the effects of a Nature deficit on humans reported by Louv.

Physical

- One feature of modern "civilized" life is that technology plays a major role—more so with some than with others, of course. There is some basis for believing (Louv refers to

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an article in *Maclean's* here) that "people who experience too much technology in the formative years will stunt the maturation of normal frontal lobe development." (p. 38) Such stunting will not occur (he implies) if people have sufficient direct exposure to Nature.

- A 2008 study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* found, in a study of 3,800 inner city children that "living in areas with green space has a long term positive impact on children's weight and thus health." (p. 47) Meaning that the current problem of childhood obesity is perhaps in large part a function of the indoor "confinement" characterizing the lives of so many children today. [3]

- Given that "spending more time in nature can make aging easier, perhaps even salutary," (p. 78), one can argue that aging tends to proceed less well, relatively, for those with little direct contact with Nature.

Attitudinal and Mental Effects

- People not exposed directly to Nature tend to have a lack of sensibility to Nature, and lack humility relative to Nature. (p. 18) (Both of these have implications for an individual's *behavior* relative to Nature, of course.)

- Such lack contributes to an inability to pay attention. (p. 24) For example, those with this lack do less well proofreading than those having direct exposure to Nature. (p. 29) (Wow! That's a really important point to make!)

- The lack reduces one's ability to process information. (p. 27)

- Nature-deprived students tend to have less self-esteem, and be less motivated, than those students who have not been so deprived.

- This lack of direct exposure to Nature tends to impact negatively on one's ability to think clearly, and also one's ability to be creative. (p. 24) (The latter—creativity—is also referred to on p. 33.)

- The lack reduces one's ability to see connections. Louv adds (quoting here Reyna Oleas, Director of the Tomas de Berlanga School on the island of Santa Cruz): "Off the Internet, everything is connecting you with the world. *Everything*."(p. 25) She is then quoted as saying that direct experience in Nature gives her "more sharpness and perceptual awareness."

- Such a lack tends to make one irritable/stressed, impatient (so that one makes bad decisions), and distractible—relative to those who have direct contact with Nature. (p. 28)

"Other"

- An army officer who had "served" (Louv's word, certainly not mine!) in Iraq and Afghanistan, in conducting an 18-month long study of 800 military personnel "found that the best bomb-spotters were rural people, familiar with hunting . . . . He was quoted as saying, "They know how to look at the entire environment." (p. 17)

- Too limited exposure to the environment may reduce one's intelligence. Here Louv notes that NPR commentator John Hockenberry reported on research to the effect that Albert Einstein and mathematician/philosophy Kurt Gödel "used to famously, every single day, take walks in the woods on the Princeton [University] campus." (p. 33) He also notes that "In 1977, the late Edith Cobb, a noted proponent of nature-based education, contended that geniuses share one trait: transcendent experience in nature in their early years." (p. 34) (This point is related to the "frontal lobe" comment made earlier.)

Behavior

- "Taken to its extreme, a denatured life is a dehumanized life. As the American naturalist and writer Henry Beston put it, when the wind in the grass is 'no longer a part of the human spirit, a part of very flesh and bone, man [i.e., the human] becomes, as it were, a kind of cosmic outlaw.'" (pp. 23 – 24)

- Absenteeism in schools is higher for Nature-deprived students than for those not so deprived. (p. 29)

- Likewise with graduation rates. (p. 30)

- Students who are Nature-deprived tend to be less cooperative than those not so deprived, less well-behaved, and less good at problem-solving. (p. 31)

What makes Louv's book highly readable is that he mixes research findings with quotations from people he has talked with or articles/books that he has read, but what that writing style results in is a "jumbling" of discussions of the effects of NDD with Nature therapies, and a jumbling of his discussion of the effects of NDD (in terms, e.g., of the four categories that I have used in discussing his findings). For some this may be a problem, for others it may not be—it's all a matter of taste. (I would have preferred a better organization of his materials.)

My main problem with the book, however, is its odd treatment of the subject of global warming (which is mentioned on just five pages in the book). On p. 63 Louv notes that an Australian professor named Glenn Albrecht (director of the Institute of Sustainability and Technology Policy at Murdoch University, in Perth, Australia) has coined the term "solastalgia," "which he defines as 'the pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault.' Albrecht formed his theory and invented his neologism as he worked with communities disrupted by strip mining in New South Wales'[s] Upper Hunter Region and with farmers in eastern Australia suffering from a devastating six-year drought."

Now whereas I have no quarrel with Albrecht's concept of "solastagia" (and would even add to it that I have a *nostalgia* for the place where I spent my youth—and suspect that many others have the same nostalgia). But when Albrecht asks, "Could people's mental health be harmed by an array of shifts, including subtle changes of climate?, I scratch my head (OK, not literally!). Doesn't Albrecht realize the *seriousness* of the threat posed by global warming? Why doesn't Louv "call" him on this matter—or doesn't *Louv* recognize the seriousness of this threat either?! Doesn't either Albrecht or Louv realize that global warming threatens the very *lives* of people (of *most* of the world's people, in fact) so that possible impacts on mental health are utterly trivial in comparison?

Early in the book Louv states (p. 6) that "the Nature Principle is about conservation, but also about restoring nature while restoring ourselves; about creating new natural habitats where they once were or never were, in our homes, workplaces, schools, neighborhoods, cities, suburbs, and farms. It's about the power of living in nature—not *with* it, but *in* it." What this statement indicates about Louv is that he assumes, tacitly, that the Existing Order *can* and *will* continue, that global warming will not cause its collapse.

I beg to differ with Louv on this matter, believing instead in (a) "The Inevitability of Climate Change," with (b) the crossing of the "tipping point" occurring within a matter of decades, (c) resulting in accelerating "climate change," of (d) such rapidity that only those who have anticipated this rapid change will survive the resulting devastation (involving societal collapse here and elsewhere, for example), with (e) even *such* individuals not being guaranteed that they will survive.

What "anticipating this rapid change" should involve, in my judgment, is planning to create a cooperative eco-community for oneself and others that is (a) designed to be as self-sufficient as possible (because societal collapse will make this necessary for one's survival), (b) designed with human "design specifications" in mind (see Chapters 2 – 4 of my *What Are Churches For?* eBook), and (c) designed to withstand the ravages that global warming is likely to be inflicting on us humans shortly (is *already* inflicting on us, actually!).

A point that I would now add to my earlier discussions is that given that eco-communities would be built away from major urban areas, an effort should be made to site them at locations with a diversity of biota, landforms, etc.—so that the benefits of living close to Nature can be maximized. There is enough evidence, I believe, in support of the thesis that one can benefit, in a variety of ways, from direct exposure to Nature; as a consequence, why not (a) locate an eco-community in a rural area—and then (b) begin to experience Nature as much as one is able to so do? (This is a rhetorical question, of course!)

Endnotes

1. The "seeking" and "avoiding" behavior referred to here need not be of a *conscious* nature. For example, one may be attracted to certain experiences, and be neither conscious of that fact nor aware of *why* one is attracted to those experiences. On the other hand, one may consciously dislike some of the experiences one has, but not know how to avoid engaging in the activities that give one those experiences.

2. And *differ*—for such peoples still exist in remote parts of the world.

3. Two additional factors are poor diet and a lack of exercise. However, those two factors are related to urban living; if one were living in a rural area (in a cooperative eco-community, for example), it is likely that one would not only have more direct contact with Nature, but would have a more healthful diet and would get a sufficient amount of exercise.

Another Dream [1]

Alton C. Thompson

Bart Ehrman, in his *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (2003), notes that apart from the discussions/lists of, e.g., Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Eusebius, several (canonical) books in the "New Testament" also provide evidence of diversity in early Christianity. [2] Ehrman lists (p. 177) 11 examples, including the following:

> [11] When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. [12] For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. [13] The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. [14] When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?

—Galatians 2:11 - 14

> Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters,[2] not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come.

—II Thessalonians 2:1 – 2

> As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer [4] or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work—which is by faith. [5] The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. [6] Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. [7] They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.

—I Timothy1:3 - 7

Ehrman adds that James, Revelation, Jude and II Peter also contain evidence for early diversity within (what I prefer to call) "Jesuanism" (see note 2 below).

The groups referred to favorably in these New Testament "books" would have been (what Ehrman refers to as) "proto orthodox," and thus similar in their thinking—an unsurprising fact, given that it was such people who decided what to include in, and exclude from, the New

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Testament! Those referred to *un*favorably—labeled (of course!) "heretics" by the proto-orthodox!—presumably differed not only from the proto-orthodox in their views, but from one another as well.

Until the time of Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694 – 1768), the "orthodox" version of Christian history was accepted by most—scholars as well as lay people. Since that time, however, numerous scholars (some discussed by Ehrman) have challenged the orthodox view, with each presenting his/her own interpretation of what transpired during the early years. Two facts in particular lend support to this challenge of orthodoxy:

- There is no reason to accept Paul of Tarsus as an authority on Jesus, given that he never had any direct contact with Jesus! The book of Acts, in three places, refers to Paul's alleged "conversion" experience while on the road to Damascus, but (a) that book was not written by Paul, (b) the account is questionable, and (c) his references to Damascus in his authentic letters make no reference to a conversion experience (!).

- Given the numerous—and unending, it seems!—interpretations of Jesus offered by scholars over the years (as, e.g., cynic philosopher, healer, prophet, zealot, etc.), it's impossible to be definitive regarding the nature of Jesus's life and "ministry."

In short, the earliest "authority" on Jesus could *not* have been an authority; and the "real Jesus" is even more obscure now than ever before.

It's true that the "orthodox" group emerged to dominance, but that fact gives one no reason whatsoever to believe that it was the most "authentic" of the early Jesuan groups. If anything, in fact, there are good reasons to view that group as *in*authentic:

- It emphasized purported "facts"—and therefore *beliefs*—about Jesus, whereas any fair reading of the canonical gospels—despite the variety of "pictures" of Jesus offered in those books—suggests that what Jesus was "about" was ortho*praxy* rather than ortho*doxy*.

- Emperor Constantine's "conversion" to Christianity makes one suspicious of his motives (apart from the question of the *version* of Christianity to which he was converted): Given his position as emperor, one suspects that he was attracted to a variety of Christianity that emphasized "correct belief" over "correct behavior," i.e., a version of Christianity that would be *useful* to him as emperor—because of its religious *ir*relevance! When Theodosius I later made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, it is not surprising that the version of the religion favored by him was one emphasizing correct *belief* rather than correct *behavior*: To promote a version of Christianity that would counsel love of God and neighbor would not have been *useful* to him!

The so-called "triumph" of Christianity occurred slowly: "Christians composed a small minority (as little as 2% as late as 250 AD; smaller percents prior to that!) of the Roman Empire's population of 60 million in the first two centuries after Christ [i.e., Jesus]." Constantine's "conversion" to Christianity "helped Christianity in many ways. Followers were safe from persecution, and Christian leaders were given many gifts by the Emperor. Constantine's adherence to Christianity ensured exposure of all his subjects to the religion, and he had no small domain. He also made Sunday an official Roman holiday so that more people could attend church, and made churches tax-exempt."

But that so-called "conversion," along with the decision of Theodosius I to make ("orthodox") Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, strike one as *political* decisions having nothing to do with efforts to promote an authentic Jesuan religion.

From my perspective, two lessons can be gleaned from the above discussion:

- It's time to call a halt to the search for the historical Jesus: There's (a) not enough evidence to reach definitive conclusions about his life, and (b) even if there were, a definitive history would be of little or no value to us moderns—for we moderns are perfectly capable of creating a religion relevant for today, without any help from people who lived centuries ago.

- The *valuing* implicit in that search has been misguided, in that the well-being of *people* has "taken a back seat" to the determination of *truth*.

Referring specifically to the *second* point above, the problems with a valuing of truth over "flesh and blood" human beings are that:

- Such an orientation is a hindrance—a barrier—to communication with others. That is, if one is convinced that one is in possession of the truth, although one will find it easy to communicate with others who share one's views, one will not even want to *listen* to those who have divergent views. As a consequence of associating only with those who share one's views, those views will tend to become more rigid, more firmly held—and thereby ever more a barrier to communication with those having views that differ from one's own.

- Those in positions of power who have an orientation to truth tend to feel a *right*—and even *duty*—to *impose* that "truth" upon others—by *force*, if necessary. In effect, their "love for others" extends only to those who *agree* with them. And those being *persecuted* by others obsessed with—even "possessed" by!—their "truth" are not likely to accept that persecution with grace—leading to divisions and to conflict.

With the rise of "civilized" existence, the tendencies described above seem to have become almost inevitable—and not just in the realm of religion. Given that these tendencies are (in my mind, at least) clearly undesirable, the question arises: Can those tendencies be somehow combatted?

It seems clear to me that in the small-scale societies that existed prior to the Agricultural Revolution of 10,000 years ago, the *small size* of the societies itself made the emergence of these tendencies difficult, if not impossible. As societies grew in size, however, the bonds that formerly connected one individual with another were broken, and this breakage is what (I believe) enabled the tendencies described above to emerge.

What once was "natural" is no longer, so that if the bonds between individuals are to be restored (to a degree, at least), what's necessary is to introduce an "artificial" institution such as the Structured Interaction Group (SIG) (see Chapter 8 in this) or New Word Fellowship (NeWF) (see Sections 6 and 7 in this) in an effort to correct the situation. Fortunately (as I argue in the two eBooks cited above), participation in those institutions can have numerous benefits for participants in addition to that of bonding—including the incubation of ideas regarding how to address the threat posed to us humans by global warming.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream [3] is an admirable one, but *my* dream—that a proliferation of SIGs and NeWFs will occur—is as well. In addition, my dream, if implemented, has the potential of being "salvific" relative to the global warming threat. For that reason, my hope is that my dream does not die with me.

Endnotes

1. The allusion here is to the famous "I have a dream" speech delivered 50 years ago by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the march on Washington, DC.

2. "Jesuan" is preferable to "Christian" because not all early followers of Jesus (e.g., those for whom the gospel of Q was central) regarded him as the Christ—i.e., as the Messiah: "**Christ** (/kraɪst/) (ancient Greek: Χριστός, *Christós*, meaning 'anointed') is a translation of the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ (Māšîaḥ), the Messiah, and is used as a title for Jesus in the New Testament." Surely Prof. Ehrman is aware of this fact, and used "Christian" in preference to "Jesuan" because the former term is in common use, whereas the latter term is not. Given that "Christ" alludes to the Jewish "Messiah," the term would have been meaningful to Jews, but not to non-Jews (given the pejorative label "gentiles" by Jews).

3. I was pleased to learn that one of the black women involved in the recent celebration of King's speech of 50 years ago was quoted as saying that her dream was that our society become less materialistic. I would only add that I would like to see our society become less individualistic— by which I mean that people in our society would become less interested in acquiring fame, power, and material things, and less selfish.

Readers of my past essays will know that I have connected the SIG/NeWF to eco-communities in that I have argued that given that our best option, so far as the threat of global warming is concerned, is to create cooperative eco-communities that are as self-sufficient as possible, and have argued that the SIG and NeWF could serve as vehicles for advancing that idea.

What occurs to me in conjunction with Martin Luther King, Jr., is that a number of years ago William H. Pease published a book entitled *Black Utopia: Negro Experiments in America* (1963)—a book that I used to have in my library, but discarded to make room for another book. The Negro "experiments" discussed by Pease had the intent of preparing blacks for life in the Larger Society.

Several weeks ago, however, a very different concept occurred to me—that *blacks* could be the vanguard in an eco-community movement. I thus sent an email to James Causey, a black columnist at the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, mentioning this possibility, in the hope that it would appear to him, and that he would use his column to publicize the idea. I must report, however, that I received no response from Mr. Causey, nor have I seen a column by him that refers to the idea.

Technology's Downside

Alton C. Thompson

In a previous essay I argued that civilization was a pathological development, but rather than discussing *how* it was pathological, my focus was "on identifying what I regard as key 'events' in civilization's development—humankind's 'worst mistake.'" In the current essay, however, my theme is that one of the key features associated with civilization's development—technological development—has had a "downside" that has too often been overlooked, downplayed. Given this, the fact that many equate technological development with civilizational "progress" is disturbing, for widespread acceptance of such an ideology—for that's precisely what it is!—may drive our species to extinction (we have *already* "succeeded" in driving many other species to extinction!).

A useful beginning point here is clarification of the term "technology." Here is one attempt at definition:

> **Technology** (from Greek τέχνη, *techne*, "art, skill, cunning of hand"; and -λογία, *-logia*[1]) is the making, modification, usage, and knowledge of tools, machines, techniques, crafts, systems, and methods of organization, in order to solve a problem, improve a pre-existing solution to a problem, achieve a goal, handle an applied input/output relation or perform a specific function. It can also refer to the collection of such tools, including machinery, modifications, arrangements and procedures

I find this definition rather cumbersome, and in offering an alternative would first note that although "technology" suggests the word "technique," connecting those two words is somewhat misleading. Let me explain why:

The performance of a given task involves a series of steps—taken by one individual or by several individuals—and if we think of those steps as *only* involving human labor, those steps can be thought of as constituting a *technique*—but not a *technology*. For me, technology is something that is employed in the performance of tasks—but specifically those tasks that involve the use of *equipment*. I would define "equipment" broadly to include the use of spears, draft animals, soil, tools, machines, computers, etc. What this indicates is that I think of "equipment" as including a great deal of variety, with that variety being highly important—because the *effects* associated with, e.g., the use of draft animals are very different from those associated with the use of, e.g., machines. This point is too often ignored by those who offer blanket condemnations of technology.

Tools and machines, for example, are *human-made* items [1] (a "manufactured" item is, in terms of the very origin of that word, something made by hand [2]), and involve the use of *materials*.

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The material(s) involved in the creation of a tool/machine is derived—ultimately, if not directly—from the Earth, and an important distinction regarding materials is that some are *renewable*, some *non-renewable*. That is, with some materials "harvesting" does not deplete the material, so long as it does not exceed the replenishment rate; with other materials, however, no replenishment occurs, so that the possibility of their being "used up" exists.

Other important facts about materials, as they relate to tools/machines and equipment, are that:

- Not only do tools/machines *consist* of materials, but materials are often used in their creation—i.e., their creation often does not *just* involve hand labor.

- Those materials often take the form of *equipment(s)* (!).

- Equipment is often involved in *extracting* the material(s) used to create the equipment used in performing a given task.

- The *end product* of a given task is often a material item—a "producer" item (i.e., a piece of equipment!) or a "consumer" item, "consumer" here referring to *ultimate* consumer.

The main point that I want to make here, though, is that technology—as I conceive it—(a) involves the use of equipment, that equipment (b) consists of a material(s), and (c) the fact that materials are *necessarily* associated with a technology can have important implications.

Once a technology [3] comes to be used in performing a given task, (a) the *steps* associated with the task will change, (b) the *number of people* associated with the task will change (be reduced, presumably), (c) the *length of time* associated with performing the task will be changed (decreased, presumably), (d) the *cost* of performing the task will be affected (reduced, presumably), along with various other changes—some that become *immediately* evident, some only evident *long after*, some *never* recognized. And among these "other" changes, some will be of a *positive* nature, some *negative*.

It is the latter—negative effects—that are given attention in this essay. *That* fact should not, however, give the reader the impression I am an anti-technology person: I embrace the notion of "appropriate technology," and am an admirer of the work, e.g., of Will Allen (here in Milwaukee) and John and Nancy Jack Todd. My position is that technologies are not *inherently* harmful but, rather, that technologies vary in the *degree* to which they are harmful. The problem here, however, is that it is often difficult, if not impossible, to determine, in advance, *whether* a given technology will be harmful, or the *degree* to which it will be harmful; so that even if a given technology *is* analyzed thoroughly *prior* to its implementation—which too often is *not* done!—one may not discover problems with the technology's use until years, even decades, after its implementation.

In discussing problems associated with the use of technologies, I will do so under four (4) headings, the first being the *factors* behind the development of a technology—i.e., the factors that help explain the development of a technology. This may include—but is not limited to—the (unconscious) *motivation* behind the development of technologies.

Explaining Technology's Development

A useful starting point here is with the fact that the late (died on June 20 of this year) Philip E. Slater, in his *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point* (1970), made a number of critical comments relative to technology, the following pertaining—indirectly, at least—to the matter of motivation:

- One of the major goals of technology in America is to "free" us from the necessity of relating to, submitting to, depending upon, or controlling other people. Unfortunately, the more we have succeeded in doing this the more we have felt disconnected, bored, lonely, unprotected, unnecessary, and unsafe. (p. 26)

- The need to triumph over each other and the tendency to prostrate ourselves before technology are in fact closely related. We turn continually to technology to save us from having to cooperate with each other. (p. 133)

What these statements suggest is that what has motivated the development of technology (in the United States, at any rate) is a feeling of isolation common with Americans—a feeling imposed on this society's inmates by the very "workings" of society itself. Given that this feeling violates one's inborn need [4] for a "connection" with others, but that the "workings" of our society make establishment of such connections difficult, *compensatory* behavior [5] is the result.

What Slater was arguing here, it seems to me, is that developments in technology have been motivated by an unconscious attempt to recover the loss of connection involved with modern life, but that such attempts are, by their very nature, doomed to failure. The irony here is that *despite* that fact—*because* of it, in fact!—*further developments* in technology are motivated! In short, at base, technology development in the United States has been a *pathological* phenomenon! We Westerners—Americans in particular—have created a merry-go-round (itself a technological development!) for ourselves, and our actions *intensify*, rather than *alleviate*, our pathology—so that only some external force (i.e., some sort of "earthquake") is capable of causing us to extricate ourselves from this merry-go-round. Riding a merry-go-round is supposed to give one pleasure, but the one that we are on does anything but.

Slater's argument (as I have interpreted it here!) has, I believe, a great deal of merit—insofar as his intent was to *generalize* about technology *per se* with reference especially to the United States, not to comment on *particular* technologies. My principal quarrel with his argument is that (a) Slater does not distinguish between *different* technologies, (b) in general he presents *too-extreme* (deterministic?) a viewpoint, and (c) he fails to recognize *individual differences* in (1)

degree of exposure to technology, and (2) *reactions* to technology as a result of one's uniqueness as an individual.

This latter fact gives us some basis for hope, for those in our society who have been able successfully to *combat* the "loneliness" created by the nature of our society have been able to remove themselves from the merry-go-round; and although they will not be able to help *all* of those on the merry-go-round get off (given the likelihood that global warming will wipe out most of the world's population within a matter of decades), they may be able to help *some* get off— and those people, along with themselves, may survive the ravages that global warming will be inflicting on us humans over the next few decades.

In adding to Slater's argument, I would first note that his discussion did not touch on the *origins* of technology in the dim past. I would argue that the disruptions in life that occurred with the Agricultural Revolution set the stage for technological development in that those disruptions introduced a *motivating* factor, but little in response to that factor for centuries. However, the much later development of mechanistic thinking, beginning in the seventeenth century, as it seeped down into the general population, unwittingly encouraged a mode of thinking conducive to technological development—and likely played an important role in the Industrial Revolution. Also, the simple fact of human intelligence and creativity likely made inevitable some technological development; and various factors of a *particularistic* nature operated in different cultures to spur technological development. Thus, although pathological factors may have played a role in technology's development, other factors—less negative in character—did as well.

A breakdown in the bonds that connect one person with another (a process that occurred with the Agricultural Revolution) was likely what enabled technological development *initially* to "take off"—slowly at first, and rapidly after the Industrial Revolution. This leads me to the *second* problem (pathological motivations being the first one) that I would associate with technology— one that is not on its face a problem, but can be one when related to the third and fourth problems discussed below. The second problem is that technological development tends to acquire a life of its own—i.e., it tends to "feed upon itself."

Technology Tends to "Feed on Itself"

What I mean in making this statement is that after a technology has been developed, and becomes deployed, humans—being intelligent creatures (so they say!)—will tend, quite "naturally," to *evaluate* the technology, and some creative individuals will develop ideas regarding how the technology can be "improved." By "improved" I am referring especially, although not exclusively, with the *equipment* associated with the technology. Once the *idea* for an "improvement" has been generated, it's likely that that idea will be *implemented*—so that the *behaviors* formerly associated with the task in question will likely change, as well as (possibly) the *material*(s) used to create the new equipment.

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The introduction of the new technology will likely be an "improvement" in one or more senses (e.g., the task can now be completed more quickly, and with less human labor), but what will tend to go unnoticed is the *effects* that may be associated with the new materials being used to create the equipment (assuming the use of new materials). It is highly possible that those effects will be of a negative nature—but not determined as such until long after their implementation. For example, the invention of the steam engine helped revolutionize manufacturing and transportation, but the use of coal to create steam created a filthy atmosphere (noticed immediately) and caused global warming (not widely noticed until rather recently).

Veblen's Criticisms

The third problem that I will identify with technology is related to the second one, and is contained in Thorstein Veblen's brilliant observation (*The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts*, 1914, p. 314) that "invention is the mother of necessity." [6] Because technological development is a process that tends to "feed upon itself," the development of a new technology tends to create an immediate demand for its use. Thus, existing technology tends to be abandoned in favor of the new, despite the fact that the old technology is still useable. Here Veblen that that (p. 314 – 315) "in the current competitive armaments, . . . [7] equipment is subject to constant depreciation and obsolescence, not through decline or decay, but by virtue of new improvements." That is, given that equipment is associated with any given technology, the development of a new technology, with new equipment, tends to lead to an abandonment of the equipment associated with the old technology—which, as Veblen noted, was wasteful.

In referring to the automobile, telephone, typewriter, etc., Veblen asserted that (p. 316): "The largest secure result of these various modern contrivances designed to facilitate and abridge travel and communication appears to be an increase in the traffic per unit of outcome, acceleration of the pace and heightening of the tension at which the traffic is carried on, and a consequent increase of nervous disorders and shortening of the effective working life of those engaged in this traffic." Once these new technologies are introduced, they affect the lives of people, and "life is not offered on any other terms" to the citizenry—the only choice offered to people is to *take* the new technology.

Physical and Psychological Health

Notable in the above quotation is reference to *psychological* implications involved in the shift to a new technology, which brings us to the fourth problem associated with technology, its negative *health* effects—a topic dealt with in, e.g., Chellis Glendinning's *When Technology Wounds: The Human Consequences of Progress* (1990).

Glendinning begins her "Discovery" chapter by stating (p. 43): "For most of us the technological encounter is happening every moment of our lives. We live in what Marshall McLuhan calls [s] 'technological environment,' and our very sense of existence is shaped by the continuous interaction" that we have with technology. Later she asserts that (p. 102) our

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society's "*raison d'étre* is technological development;" and adds that there is (p. 120) "a taboo against challenging our technology, there is a taboo against questioning the institutions that purvey our technology, and there is a taboo against confessing harm by technology.

She seems to locate this taboo in the fact (she claims) that (p. 122) we "equate technological development with human evolution." That is, although evolution *per se* is a *biological* process, the fact that we developed a large brain during that process made it *inevitable* that we would use that brain to develop technology—so that we can think of technological development as continuing, on a non-biological level, biological evolution.

I'm not sure that many in the general population would "buy" this argument, given the resistance that many in that group have to accepting the hypothesis that humans have evolved. And although I find this argument interesting, as my previous discussion in this essay indicates, I would have to regard this argument as simplistic.

Glendinning is correct in noting that our lives are dominated by technology—in our homes, in traveling to and from work, in our work itself, etc.—and our exposure to technology can lead to a variety of physical and psychological problems (see, e.g., Glendinning for details). What disturbs me *personally* most about technology, however, is our tendency, when a problem arises with a given technology's use, to simply *assume*, tacitly, that the *answer* to that problem must be a technological one!

Conclusions

The fundamental problem that we face today is that of global warming, and although the answers that have been advanced for solving this problem have tended to be "technological fixes," I have become convinced that (a) there *is* no solution to this problem, because global warming is inevitable; but that (b) insofar as there *is* an answer, it is societal system change—with the development of a program to create, and work for the proliferation of, cooperative eco-communities as the best *means* for achieving this objective. The general "thrust" of thinking in this society is contrary to such a solution; my hope, however, is that there are enough people in this society who agree with me on this, and have the means to pursue it, to enable its implementation—thereby saving at least some people from the ravages that global warming will be inflicting on us humans—has already *begun* to inflict, in fact!

If such a program gets underway (I would like to say *when* rather than *if*, but . . .), the communities that would be established as a part of the program would be small enough that they would only be able to support a rather "low" level of technology. Over time, however, as communities established ties with neighboring eco-communities, it would be possible for communities to begin to specialize somewhat, enabling them to adopt more sophisticated technologies. When that occurs, my hope is that the *social structure* of the developing New Society will be such that the adoption of harmful technologies will be made difficult—that a more "Amish-like" attitude will prevail relative to technology.

Thus, with (a) close contact with Nature, a (b) way of life that accords well with our "design specifications" as humans (see Chapters 2 – 4 in the eBook cited in endnote 4 below), and a (c) "safe" technology, the residents of the New Society should be able to be healthy and happy—while also being "civilized," but now in a much better manner!

Endnotes

1. *Typically*, I should add. At times a stick or stone that one simply picks up can serve as a tool.

2. Explained in this quote: "From French, manufacture, from Old French, from Medieval Latin manūfactūra: Latin manū, ablative of *manus*, hand + Latin factūra, working of a metal, from factus, past participle of *facere*, to make."

3. I should perhaps note here that Lewis Mumford, in the 1930s, divided technological development (up to 1930) into three phases: Eotechnic (1000 – 1800 CE), Paleotechnic (1700 – 1900), and Neotechnic (1900 – 1930).

4. A need developed during the long period in our evolution when our ancestors were gatherer-hunters. In Chapters 2 – 4 of my *What Are Churches* For? I use the term "design specifications" in place of "needs"—in recognition of the fact that our innate "needs" were developed during an evolutionary process.

5. I prefer "substitutionary behavior" to "compensatory behavior," given that the behavior(s) in question rarely actually compensates—fully, or even to an important degree—for what is missing.

6. In a footnote on the bottom of p. 316 Veblen asserted that "the aphorism often cited, that 'Necessity is the Mother of Invention,' appears to be nothing better than a fragment of uncritical rationalism. It offer a rationalized, *ex post facto* account of changes that take place, and reflects that ancient preconception by help of which the spokesman of edification were enabled to interpret all change as an improvement due to the achievement of some definitely foreknown end."

7. Veblen was referring here to World War I, which the United States entered in 1917.

A Critique of Bateson's "Snowball in Hell"

Alton C. Thompson

Predictions of environmental problems induced by human actions go back at least to 1847. In that year George Perkins Marsh [1801 – 1882]—then a U. S. Congressperson—presented a lecture to the Agricultural Society of Rutland County, Vermont in which he said (among other things of environmental relevance):

> Man cannot at his pleasure command the rain and the sunshine, the wind and frost and snow, yet it is certain that climate itself has in many instances been gradually changed and ameliorated or deteriorated by human action. The draining of swamps and the clearing of forests perceptibly effect the evaporation from the earth, and of course the mean quantity of moisture suspended in the air.

What's remarkable about Marsh's comments is that they were delivered "a full half a century before Svante Arrhenius [1859 – 1927] proposed that carbon dioxide emitted by the 'enormous combustion of coal by our industrial establishments' might warm the world (something he thought would be beneficial)."

The "person of interest" for the present essay, however, is Gregory Bateson [1904 – 1980], who in his "Form, Substance, and Difference" lecture, [1] reprinted in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972, 1987), stated (p. 326):

> If you put God outside and set him vis-a-vis his creation and if you have the idea that you are created *in* his image, you will logically and naturally see yourself as outside and against the things around you. And as you arrogate all mind to yourself, you will see the world around you as mindless and therefore not entitled to moral or ethical consideration. The environment will seem to be yours to exploit. Your survival unit will be you and your folks or conspecifics against the environment of other social units, other races and the brutes and vegetables.
>
> If this is your estimate of your relation to nature *and you have an advanced technology,* your likelihood of survival will be that of a snowball in hell. You will die either of the toxic by-products of your own hate, or, simply, of over-population and overgrazing. The raw materials of the world are finite.

Bateson added (p. 327):

> If I am right, the whole of our thinking about what we are and what other people are has got to be restructured. This is not funny, and I do not know how long we have to do it in. If we continue to operate on the premises that were fashionable in the precybernetic era, and which were especially underlined and strengthened during the Industrial Revolution, which seemed to validate the Darwinian unit of survival [i.e., the individual], we may have twenty or thirty years [i.e., until 1990 or 2000] before the logical *reductio ad absurdum* of our old positions destroys

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> us. Nobody knows how long we have, under the present system, before some disaster strikes us, more serious than the destruction of any group of nations. The most important task today is, perhaps, to learn to think in the new way [i.e., to think in *systems* terms]. Let me say that I don't know how to think that way.

Bateson's argument here seems to have been as follows:

1. We are in a crisis situation—which, he suggested, might become especially noticeable by 1990 or 2000 CE (when we would perhaps be "destroyed").

2. We are in this crisis situation for two basic reasons:

   a. We perceive the environment as exploitable.

   b. We have an "advanced technology."

3. We perceive the environment as exploitable because:

   a. We perceive it as mindless (for we "arrogate all mind" to ourselves); and

   b. We perceive ourselves as *apart from* (rather than a *part of*) the rest of the global ecosystem.

4. We perceive ourselves as apart from the global ecosystem because we believe in a God that is outside the global ecosystem (i.e., is transcendent rather than immanent. [2]

5. (Bateson offered no explanation for *why* we have an "advanced technology," or why we perceive the environment as "mindless.")

Given our behavior toward the environment, we are headed for disaster—as early as the 1990-2000 time frame. There *is* reason for hope, however, given that:

1. "Nobody knows [for certain] how long we have . . . ."

2. Therefore, there may be time to do what we *need* to do, which is to develop a new way of thinking—systems thinking. Bateson admitted, however: "Let me say that I don't know how to think that way."

Did Bateson present a sound argument? My view is that he did not. The explanation that *I* would offer differs from that offered by Bateson both in its *structure*—it is embedded in a developmental scenario—and in the *points* that it makes. I begin here, then, by presenting that scenario, and then offer some comments on Bateson's argument.

<div align="center">A Developmental Scenario</div>

Our ancestors were tree-dwellers, our distant ancestor, *Australopithecus*, having been forced out of the trees by environmental changes. [3] Those members of that *genus* who were best

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adapted—physically and sociologically—to the new environment were the ones who survived, produced progeny, and became the ancestors of us modern humans.

In descending from the trees, our ancestors encountered *predators* [4], so that those most adept at escaping predators (the "flight" response)—by being *pre-adapted*, to a degree, to running on their hind legs—had a better chance of surviving than those less so adept. In addition, living in small groups provided a survival advantage to a group's members, given that *several* individuals (males, presumably) were better able to *fight off* predators than were isolated individuals. Finally, living in a group provided advantages in *food acquisition*, in that the capabilities of a single person are multiplied when one is a member of a group.

Group living works best if those living in a given group *cooperate* with others in the group, and this occurred via the operation of several mechanisms. First, given that female-choice sexual selection [5] likely occurred in the early history of our species, females would have tended to select as mates only those males who evidenced an inclination to (a) provide protection *for* them, and to (b) share food *with* them. This tended to result in individuals—not just males—who had a *genetic* proclivity for cooperative behavior.

Second, youth growing up in a group on the one hand *observe* cooperative behavior occurring, and therefore infer that such behavior is "natural," what is expected of them—so that they tend to engage in such behavior for that reason. Third, cooperative behavior was likely *explicitly taught* to the young by their elders, and the young were at times provided with (including by themselves!) *activities* that helped develop in them the *habit* of cooperating with others in the group.

A final factor that likely caused cooperative behavior to become commonplace is that because humans are a *social* species, males engaged in trapping/hunting would tend to find the cooperative behavior involved with that activity *enjoyable*, and the females engaged in gathering with other females would find the cooperative behavior involved in *that* activity enjoyable as well. Finding cooperating with others as enjoyable would provide those cooperating with an incentive to engage in such behavior in the future.

With those early humans living in groups having a high probability of surviving, and producing progeny, the progeny *themselves* would *also* have a good chance of surviving, and continuing the group—with group-splitting occurring, however, when group size began to become "excessive".

The adaptation that occurred after our ancestors became land-dwellers occurred over a long period of time, and during that period of time there was a *co-development* of (a) humans as biological entities and (b) their gatherer-hunter way of life—i.e., each was a cause of the other's development. Not only did *physical* changes occur during this period, but the development of a *brain* of increasingly larger size—encouraged by the fact that such a development (a) conferred a survival advantage (in surviving the threat posed by predators), and (for males) (b) increased one's chances of being chosen for mating purposes by females.

The development of an increasingly larger brain, along with certain physical developments, enabled humans to develop their ability to *communicate*—via signals, signs, and then (oral) language. This development of means of communication then enabled humans to develop their ability to *think*—to make inferences and to make deductions.

In describing the knowledge gained by our early ancestors, a somewhat useful distinction is that of *idiographic* knowledge vs. *nomothetic* knowledge—a distinction introduced by philosopher Wilhelm Windelband in the late 1800s. What Windelband had in mind, in making this distinction, is that with some academic disciplines the goal is to provide an accurate factual record (e.g., History), whereas with other disciplines the goal is to arrive at (true) generalizations (e.g., the various sciences)—a further distinction here being *restricted* generalizations (e.g., Astronomy), and *unrestricted* ones (e.g., Physics), what are commonly referred to as "laws."

Perhaps the thinking of early humans is best described as leaning toward idiographic; however, I prefer to think of it as being *particularistic*—by which I mean that the humans in a given early group tended to learn a great number of particular facts about the small area within which they lived. Although the knowledge that they gained was *geographically* limited to a significant degree, early humans developed *classifications* of the things that they observed in their small world, and also developed *generalizations* about that which they observed—e.g., how their environment changed during the course of a typical year, when a particular type of berry was ready to be picked, how a given animal tended to behave, etc.

An implication of the fact that our early ancestors developed classifications is that they made distinctions, but did so in *kind* rather than *degree* terms. That is, they tended not to think in terms of more or less, superior and inferior; put another way, they tended not to think in invidious terms (a concept that played an important role in Thorstein Veblen's thinking—e.g., his *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1899.) We moderns tend to think of invidious thinking as "natural," but in fact it is a mode of thinking that developed in response to the social differentiation that occurred concurrently with the Agricultural Revolution.

What especially differentiated early humans from us modern humans was that they were "immersed" in their surround—which was *primarily* a "natural" surround—one that did not include many humans or human-made things. Not only were their lives *lived* in that surround; their *minds* were *absorbed* in that surround. How could their minds *not* be?!

An important implication of that "absorption" is that it tended to produce in our distant ancestors an *adaptational* mentality. That is, their particular "situation" virtually *guaranteed* that they would develop—*but not themselves necessarily be aware of this fact*—an "attitude" toward the surround that included certain important features:

- They developed an *appreciation* of—even feelings of *reverence/awe* toward—the surround. The surround was *important* to them, given their utter dependence upon it—and they were at least dimly aware of that fact.

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- Simply *sensing* the surround was a source of satisfaction, well-being for them. That is, they "recognized" what we would today refer to as "beauty" in the surround, and reacted to that recognition with a feeling of pleasure.

- In having an appreciation (in a broad sense) for the surround, their *behavior* relative to the surround was affected. This was especially revealed in the case of animals: Although they needed the meat from certain animals for sustenance, and recognized that killing was necessary for this to occur, they engaged in that killing with reluctance, and may have followed acts of killing with acts "designed" to atone for the killing.

Early humans were not able to *maintain* an adaptive mentality, however, and the development of the human brain may have been the primary responsible factor. The development (by females) of agriculture may have occurred by accident, as seeds that had been gathered earlier, but dropped in a group's "residential area" began to sprout—giving certain females the idea of deliberately *planting* seeds. The development of agriculture—the "worst mistake in the history of the human race," [6] per Jared Diamond—enabled the (a) growth of groups into larger groups (i.e. societies), (b) the larger size of which fostered the development of a *control* mentality that (d) resulted in the emergence of class and caste systems—and (e) an *exploitative* attitude with reference to the surround, which attitude (f) was *acted* upon.

Also, the fact that people's lives became increasingly *removed* from a natural surround implied that their "design specifications" as humans (see Chapters 2 – 4 in this eBook) were being violated in that:

- They were no longer exposed to the stimuli to which they had been exposed previously.

- The behaviors associated with their new way of life (under duress for most) differed from those that they had engaged in before.

- The way that they now used their brains was different from what it had been before.

It's true that humans are *capable* of adapting to a variety of situations, but it does not follow from that fact that adaptation is necessarily a "good thing." As René Dubos stated (p. 146) in 1968, "Paradoxically, . . . the very fact that man [i.e., humans] readily achieves biological and sociocultural adjustments to so many different kinds of stresses and undesirable conditions is dangerous for his welfare and his future." Indeed, there is a strong possibility that insofar as technological development has occurred for pathological reasons [7], what this reflects is the "Discrepancy" [8] that has existed with humans since the Agricultural Revolution: Ways of life have changed since then, but our biology has changed but little. [9]

In short, my view of the "roots of our current crisis" is that a change in our *way of life*—from gathering-hunting to agriculture during the "Agricultural Revolution"—set in motion a sequence of other changes whose "fruits" have included the whole of Western history—and specifically intellectual, institutional, geographical, etc., developments that have "given" us our current crisis.

<p style="text-align:center">Some Brief Comments on Bateson's Argument</p>

My explanation of why we are currently faced with an environmental crisis differs from that of Bateson in several respects:

1. It is *developmental* in nature—concerned both with human evolution and the beginnings of human history.

2. I make no reference to our thinking of the rest of Nature as "mindless."

3. I agree with Bateson that we have tended to think of ourselves as *apart from* Nature, but do not connect that with beliefs about the nature of God. Rather, I think of that intellectual development as one of the many "fruits" of the Agricultural Revolution.

4. I make no reference to developing a new way of thinking as the answer to our ecological crisis—for the scenario that I offered above made no reference to "answers." That fact does not mean that I lack *ideas* on this matter; rather, it simply means that I chose not to make such ideas as a part of my scenario—but will present them, briefly, shortly.

Before doing so, however, I would point out that we are much closer to environmental disaster now than when Bateson delivered his address (in 1970). Consider the following statements, for example, by Prof. Guy MacPherson, a professor emeritus at the University of Arizona. The quotations are from his "Climate-Change Summary and Update":

> On a planet 4 C hotter than baseline, all we can prepare for is human extinction (from Oliver Tickell's 2008 synthesis in the *Guardian*).

> as pointed out in the 1 August 2013 issue of *Science*, in the near term Earth's climate will change orders of magnitude faster than at any time during the last 65 million years.

> the good ol' days, back when atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations were below 400 parts per million (ppm). We'll blow through the 400 ppm mark soon, probably for the first time in 3.2 to 5 million years.

> a research paper published in the 28 August 2013 of *Nature* indicates the East Atlantic Ice Sheet (EAIS) has undergone rapid changes in the past five decades. The latter is the world's largest ice sheet and was previously thought to be at little risk from climate change. But it has undergone rapid changes in the past five decades, signaling a potential threat to global sea levels. The EAIS holds enough water to raise sea levels more than 50 meters.

Greenhouse-gas emissions keep rising, and keep setting records. According to 10 June 2013 report by the International Energy Agency, the horrific trend continued in 2012, when carbon dioxide emissions set a record for the fifth consecutive year. The trend puts disaster in the cross-hairs, with the ever-conservative International Energy Agency claiming we're headed for a temperature in excess of 5 C.

The Arctic isn't Vegas—what happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic—it's the planet's air conditioner. In fact, as pointed out 10 June 2013 by research scientist Charles Miller of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory: "Climate change is already happening in the Arctic, faster than its ecosystems can adapt. Looking at the Arctic is like looking at the canary in the coal mine for the entire Earth system."

Ocean acidification associated with increased atmospheric carbon dioxide is proceeding at an unprecedented rate—**the fastest in 300 million years**—leading to great simplification of ecosystems, and capable of triggering mass extinction by itself.

An increasing number of scientists agree that warming of 4 to 6 C causes a dead planet. And, they go on to say, we'll be there by 2060.

The above statements give one precious little basis for any degree of optimism! However, they are statements that deserve to be taken seriously—but who is doing so?! In watching television, reading the newspaper, talking with others, etc., one finds no sense of urgency whatsoever! Unbelievable—but true!

Conclusions

As I have argued in previous essays on this site, our situation today is *hopeless* (something Bateson could not have known in 1970). Although it's *conceivable* that global warming could be halted, the *likelihood* of that occurring is close to zero. What's likely, rather, is that "runaway" climate change will occur within a few decades (assuming that it has not yet begun!), and that the increased heat, along with starvation, disease, violence, flooding, etc., will wipe out most of the world's population

The only hope that I see is (as I have stated in numerous previous essays on this site) in a *cooperative eco-community movement*, which might be able to save a few people. But because I see no signs of such a movement developing, I find it difficult to have any degree of optimism regarding the future.

Endnotes

1. The footnote supplied to this in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* reads this way: "This was the Nineteenth Annual Korzybski Memorial Lecture, delivered January 9, 1970, under the auspices of the Institute of General Semantics. It is here re-printed from the *General Semantics* Bulletin, No. 37, 1970, by permission of the Institute of General Semantics."

2. In the "Abrahamic" religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), "God" is typically conceived in terms of transcendence. This is an odd fact given that when, in Exodus 3, Moses asked (v. 13) God

what His name was, God responded (v. 14) "I Am"-- which seemingly suggests that God should be thought of as immanent rather than transcendent. *That* fact suggests, in turn, that Jesus, in his "Lord's Prayer," erred not only in referring to God as a "Father," but to a place out there some place called "Heaven."

Of course, it is highly questionable that the Lord's Prayer is authentic. As Robert M. Price (also see this) has stated, the " recent scrutiny of John Dominic Crossan, Randel Helms, Dale and Patricia Miller, and Thomas L. Brodie has made it inescapably clear that virtually the entirety of the gospel narratives and much of the Acts are wholly the product of haggadic midrash upon previous scripture."

3. See, e.g., Steven M. Stanley, *Children of the Ice Age: How a Global Catastrophe Allowed Humans to Evolve*. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1996, 1998.

4. See, e.g., Donna Hart and Robert W. Sussman, *Man the Hunted: Primates, Predators, and Human Evolution*. New York: Westview Press, 2005.

5. See pp. 163 – 167, and 269 – 272, in Nancy Makepeace Tanner*, On Becoming Human*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

6. One reason being that it enabled war criminal George W. Bush to be elected to the presidency in the United States!

7. Philip E. Slater, in his *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point* (1970) makes numerous negative comments about technology, suggesting that technological development has occurred basically for pathological reasons.

8. The "Discrepancy" referred to here is between the (a) way of life for which we humans became "designed" prior to the Agricultural Revolution and the (b) way of life that we currently have— for most of us are *forced* to live.

9. Sociobiologist David P. Barash has referred to our biology as a "tortoise" and our changing ways of life as a "hare."

The Values Hoax

Alton C. Thompson [1]

On its website, the Foundation for a Better Life has an impressive list, presented alphabetically, of 93 (!) values which it is promoting—from achievement to courtesy to honor to motivation to volunteering. In a number of cases the same value may be given more than one name—e.g., "caring" and "kindness"—so that if the Foundation's list were to be analyzed carefully, its size might be reduced considerably, without any real loss in meaning.

Each value identified is accompanied by an inspirational story—e.g., "excellence" is accompanied by a story, by an anonymous author, who writes of his dad:

> My Dad was the last of the craftsman . . . . The excellent work [he did hanging wallpaper] didn't surprise me, but what he did before he smoothed on the last section, did—he signed and dated the wall.
>
> "I always sign my work," he said and then added, "Can you sign the end of your day?"
>
> I'll never forget the message or the man.

The goal of the Foundation for a Better Life is to "offer inspirational messages to people everywhere as a contribution toward promoting good values, good role models and a better life." It promotes "good values" by creating

> public service campaigns to communicate the values that make a difference in our communities. These uplifting messages, utilizing television, movie theaters, billboards, radio and the internet, model the benefits of a life lived by positive values. We believe people are basically good but sometimes just need a reminder. And we believe that the positive values we live by are worth more when we *pass them on*.

The website for this Foundation does not disclose the sources of its financial support, which fact suggests that it is not supported by a religious organization—for if it were, the identity of that organization(s) would surely have been made known on the website. What's likely, rather, is that the Foundation receives its support from business organizations—which support this Foundation because they believe that doing so will serve their interests. Will, for example, help in keeping the society reasonably stable.

There are two good reasons for suspecting that the Foundation receives its support from business organizations. First, it is to be noted that the *concept* of values is an *individualistic* one. What I mean by so characterizing the concept is that the basic assumption underlying the concept of values is that the behavior of any given person is the result of *conscious* choices, *freely* made.

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Such an assumption is not merely naïve, but ignorant: One does not need a degree in Psychology to know that decisions are rarely a result of free choice; one only needs common sense to know that. It is obvious to most people, for example, that much of one's behavior, throughout one's life, is *adaptational* in nature. That is, when one is very young one adapts one's behavior to one's parents, one's siblings, one's relatives, etc. When one enters school, one adapts one's behavior to one's teachers and fellow students. When one marries, one adapts one's behavior to one's spouse, one's spouses's relatives, one's neighbors, those with whom one works, etc.

Individuals vary in their ability to adapt, but most are able to adapt as they age—with those lacking such an ability developing psychological and/or physical problems, becoming anti-social, etc. Most of us perhaps adapt more than is *good* for us—from the standpoint of physical and mental health—but life in our society requires that one learn to adapt, and most of us do so without even thinking about it consciously. The decisions that we make are affected strongly by our interactions with others, the advertisements with which we are bombarded, genetic and personal factors, etc.—and very little of our decision-making involves conscious free choice.

As we age, we develop certain notions regarding *how* we should relate to others (from our church attendance, our reading, our viewing movies, etc.), but frequently there is a conflict between (a) the behaviors to which we give our intellectual assent and (b) the behaviors in which we actually engage—and we are often not even aware of this "discrepancy." We may *tell* ourselves that we always act in accord with our values, but in doing so we are often deceiving ourselves.

The nature of the society places severe constraints on one's behavior—so that even if one would *like* one's behavior to be guided by certain principles, unless those principles are ones *supportive* of the existing societal structure (i.e., greed, materialism, and selfishness), one will have difficulty *living* by those principles. One may be able to convince oneself that one is a "free agent," but *that* simply means that one has been "tricked" into believing that which is supportive of the Existing Order.

Individuals vary, of course, in their ability to live by values, such as the ones promoted by the Foundation for a better life. Ironically, however, a society's leaders tend to be more in thrall to the society's dominant values than are others in the society. In a sense, a society's leaders act as "enforcers" of the society's dominant values.

This is not to deny that the 93 values listed by the Foundation for a Better Life are not admirable. It *is* to say, however, that it is foolish to suggest that these values *can* become the dominant values of our society: They lack "survival value"—or at least "success value"—for life in the Existing Order, and for that reason can *never* become the society's dominant values.

That fact suggests that for those values to *become* the dominant values of the society, the *society itself* would need to change drastically. Interestingly, although the financial supporters of the Foundation, having a vested interest in the Existing Order, don't *want* that to occur (a fact that

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exposes their hypocrisy), the fact of the matter is that the Existing Order is in deep trouble. If it does not collapse for economic reasons within a few years, it will surely collapse as a result of the various phenomena associated with global warming.

If a New Society is able to arise from the resulting ashes, it may be such that the Foundation's 93 values will be the dominant values—but there is no *guarantee* that this will occur. It will occur *only* if a conscious effort is made—and soon—to create a New Society whose institutions are compatible with those values.

Should such a New Society be created, those peopling it will need to adapt to one another—just as they need to do today, as inmates of the Existing Order. One hopes, however, that those designing the New Society recognize this fact, and therefore design the New Society in such a way that this adaptation is freeing rather than oppressive. That is, I believe, not only *conceivable*, but *possible* as well! (I feel obligated to end on an optimistic note!)

Endnote

1. I belong to a terrorist organization; I am a citizen of the United States! (For details, see, e.g., Bill Blum's web site and this recent book by Chomsky and Vltchek.)

The Seriousness of the Future [1]

Alton C. Thompson

I have just returned (with my wife and younger daughter) from a trip to Massachusetts. The purpose of the trip was to visit our older daughter and her family (a Korean-born husband, daughters 2 and 4, and a son 6 weeks old—7 weeks old when we left their home). Both our daughter and her husband are United Methodist pastors, she for a church where they live south of Boston, and he for a church in Providence, Rhode Island, about 40 miles to the south of where they live (Providence having been founded, in 1636, by religious dissident Roger Williams—a man for whom I have a great deal of admiration).

The day after we arrived (i.e., on Monday), my son-in-law took me to his church, which is located in a section of Providence inhabited primarily by poor people who are recent immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nigeria, etc. While my son-in-law was off for a meeting, the church's secretary took me on a tour of the building. Close to 20 volunteers were present (the secretary herself being a volunteer), busy getting food and clothing ready to give out to neighbors on Wednesday and Thursday of that week. Seeing these activities brought tears to my eyes—of sadness that there was a need for these volunteer efforts, of happiness that these volunteers—primarily from a suburb, were willing to devote so much time and effort to this volunteer activity.

My son-in-law had explained to me, on the way to the church, that several years earlier his church had merged with a suburban church, and that the suburban building had been sold to another religious group. Most of the members of the suburban church had chosen to join other nearby churches, but a group of close to 20 had chosen not only to attend the inner-city church, but become active participants in the "mission" work of that church. Indeed, were it not for those suburban members (along with businesses that donate goods and money), the inner-city church would not be viable—for few of the people served by the church attend it, and even if many of them did, their financial resources would be insufficient to support the church.

The volunteers whom I met on my tour of the building were invariably friendly, and a joy to converse with. One man in particular, I learned later, was truly admirable: My son-in-law informed me that this particular man with whom I had visited was rather wealthy, although one would never know this from talking to him, seeing how he dressed, or seeing the automobile that he drove. What evidently gave this man pleasure and a sense of satisfaction was not selfish materialism, but helping others in need. For example, several years earlier a woman had arrived to the area from strife-torn Nigeria with little but the clothes on her back. This man had purchased on automobile for her, and had helped her in other ways—this woman being just one person with whom he had joyfully shared his wealth.

Seeing this volunteer activity made me feel guilty in not, myself, doing more volunteer work. True, I do some visitations on regular basis, but that's piddling in comparison to the volunteer work done by these fine folk at my son-in-law's church. My excuse for not doing more, I tell myself, is that my principal "calling" is elsewhere—a matter that I will comment upon shortly.

On our way home from the church, we stopped at the public library in the town where my older daughter and family live, so that I could see if they had any books for sale that I might be interested in reading during my free time while in Massachusetts. I was able to find, and then purchase (for $0.50!) a copy of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (1992). and Randall Robinson's *Defending the Spirit: A Black Life in Americ*a (1998). I was able to read both books in my free time while in Massachusetts—finding both books of considerable interest and value.

On the Sunday after we arrived, we all attended my son-in-law's church, and during his sermon he made a passing reference to global warming. In doing so, it occurred to me that pastors are in a perfect position to educate their parishioners about global warming, and dialogue with them on how this problem might be addressed. To do this pastors would, however, need (for one thing) to broaden their concept of "salvation," from one having an *other*-worldly orientation, to one (also, or mainly—or even only!) having a *this*-worldly one—saving the *lives* of *individuals*, perhaps even saving our *species*, from the ravages that global warming will soon be inflicting on us humans (to say nothing of other forms of life).

Sadly, such a "conversion" is unlikely to occur, for pastors would need not only to broaden their concept of "salvation," but also need to *re-educate* themselves—especially through leisure-time reading (of hardcopy, as well as internet articles). If only more pastors would recognize that global warming is a threat not only to their parishioners, but themselves as well! Perhaps they would then recognize the dire straits that we humans are in, and also recognize their potential— because of their unique position in our society—for becoming modern "saviors" of sorts!

Whether or not most pastors (and others) realize it, the truth of the matter is that we humans are on a path that, quite possibly, will lead to our extinction within a few decades. There is, as a consequence, a need for (a) more in our society to become aware of this possibility, and then (b) ask themselves *what*—if anything— they can do about preventing this from occurring.

I have had direct personal contact with all five of my grandchildren over the past two months, and that contact has helped reinforce in my mind the threat to their future represented by global warming. In addition, I have concluded that insofar as I have a "calling," it is to try to alert others to the threat posed by global warming. Many of my previous essays on this web site have made reference to global warming, and I use the present essay to summarize my current thoughts on this problem. The discussion below is organized under four headings, as follows:

I.   How do we *know* that global warming is occurring?
II.   *Why* is it occurring?

III.   *What* does its occurrence *mean* for us humans?

IV.   *How* should we *respond* to this problem?

I.   How Do We *Know* That Global Warming is Occurring?

The *obvious* answer to this question—via temperature recordings that have been made all over the period for a long period of time—is not the *only* answer to this question—the reason being that "global warming" is believed to have certain effects, so that one can *infer* from the occurrence of those effects that their *cause* has been global warming.

Before pursuing this point, however, it will be useful to state certain facts about Earth:

1. Earth has an *ecosystem*—has, in fact, a *hierarchy* of ecosystems. The existence of this ecosystem (and sub- such systems) implies that the components of a given system, or subsystem, are not simply "there," but are *interrelated* one with another.

2. If (for whatever reason) a *change* occurs in one component of a system, this change will affect the *nature* of the relationships involved in the entire system, along with the *character* of the other components.

3. Earth is able to support life because of (a) its location in a "habitable zone" relative to our sun, and (b) the fact that it has an atmosphere. The *average* [3] surface temperature on Earth is 14° C; however: "Without the atmosphere, the temperature on Earth would be more like the Moon, which rises to 116° C in the day, and then dips down to -173° C at night." (The "moon" reference is to *Earth's* moon, of course.)

4. Earth's atmosphere not only gives us—via its "greenhouse effect"—(a) temperature conditions, year after year, that allow us to live, but (b) provides us with oxygen to breathe, and (c) protects us from harmful radiation emanating from outer space.

5. As scientist James Lovelock has argued, it is useful to refer to Earth's ecosystem as "Gaia." The reason for this is that Earth seems to behave as if it were a single living entity. For just as humans are "equipped" with negative feedback mechanisms that function to retain relative homeostasis, so does Earth appear to be equipped with such mechanisms.

6. It must be recognized, however, that just as the human body's ability to maintain stability in the face of external threats to that stability are limited, so is Earth's ability. Negative feedback mechanisms can be stressed to a "breaking point," after which *positive* feedback mechanisms come into play—acting to hasten the given system's collapse.

7. Energy changes can play an especially important role as causal factors in affecting systems. In the case of the Earth, our *ultimate* energy source is the sun; and although the sun's energy "output" is variable, that variation evidently has little effect on Earth's average temperature, and Earth's ecosystem. Of much more relevance is variation in the "greenhouse effect."

8. There is little danger that the "greenhouse effect" will lessen during the decades ahead, but there *is* danger that it will do the opposite—a point developed in Section III. As a matter of fact, that is occurring at present!

To now address the question of concern for this section—How do we *know* that global warming is occurring?—let me begin here with a statement from NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration):

> All three major global surface temperature reconstructions show that Earth has warmed since 1880.[5] Most of this warming has occurred since the 1970s, with the 20 warmest years having occurred since 1981 and with all 10 of the warmest years occurring in the past 12 years.[6] Even though the 2000s witnessed a solar output decline resulting in an unusually deep solar minimum in 2007-2009, surface temperatures continue to increase.[7]

That is, meteorological observations over the years, in conjunction with related observations, have led scientists to conclude that since 1880, the global mean surface temperature has increased by about 0.85° C. This, combined with the "climate commitment" associated currently with the atmosphere (which is believed to be between 1° C. and 1.5° C.) means that it is virtually inevitable that before the end of this century the increase in global mean temperature since 1880 will have been at least in the 1.8° C. to 2.3° C. range. Given this likelihood, the following is highly relevant:

> Limiting the average global surface temperature increase of 2°C over the pre-industrial average has, since the 1990s, been commonly regarded as an adequate means of avoiding dangerous climate change, in science and policy making.[12][13] However, recent science has shown that the weather, environmental and social impacts of 2°C rise are much greater than the earlier science indicated, and that impacts for a 1°C rise are now expected to be as great as those previously assumed for a 2°C rise.[11] In a July 2011 speech, climate scientist Kevin Anderson explained that for this reason, avoiding dangerous climate in the conventional sense is no longer possible, because the temperature rise is already close to 1°C, with effects formerly assumed for 2°C.[14][15] Moreover, Anderson's presentation demonstrates reasons why a temperature rise of 4°C by 2060 is a likely outcome, given the record to date of action on climate, economic realities, and short window of time remaining for limiting the average surface temperature rise to 2°C or even 3°C.[14] He also states that a 4°C rise would likely be an unstable state, leading to further increases in following decades regardless of mitigation measures that may be taken.[14]

Besides meteorological and related observations, there are other reasons for believing *that* global warming is occurring (the primary concern of this section; see, e.g., this for a discussion that goes beyond the one that I offer here). In briefly discussing some of these other reasons, I will organize my presentation into two parts, (a) meteorological events that suggest that global warming is occurring, and (b) "other" reasons.

    A. <u>Meteorological Events</u>

        1. Severe storms are a sign that global warming is occurring—so that, e.g., Hurricane Sandy and the recent Typhoon Haiyan provide evidence that global warming is occurring presently.

        2. Weather is becoming increasingly unpredictable, another indication that global warming is occurring.

    B. "Other" Evidence

        1. "The summer ice melt in parts of Antarctica is at its highest level in 1,000 years . . . .," scientists have discovered.

        2. "Wildfire activity in boreal forests is anticipated to increase dramatically, with far-reaching ecological and socioeconomic consequences," states one report.

        3. Flooding is increasingly becoming a problem—reflecting the fact that weather is becoming more variable, a consequence of global warming.

        4. The oceans are becoming more acidic, another indication that global warming is occurring.

        5. (For additional evidence see, e.g., Guy McPherson's "Climate-change summary and update.")

II.   *Why* is Global Warming Occurring?

        1. Some have argued that increasing amounts of solar energy from the sun is the cause of global warming. However: "Researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Solar System Research (MPS) . . . have shown that the Sun can be responsible for, at most, only a small part of the warming over the last 20-30 years."

        2. However, virtually all climate scientists are in agreement that the reason for the increase is human activity: Humans (a) have been increasing Earth's "greenhouse

effect" through their burning of fossil fuels over the past 200 years or so (resulting in the transfer of carbon from below Earth's surface to the lower atmosphere, in the form of carbon dioxide—a "greenhouse gas"), and by (b) their deforestation activities—with the former being the basic cause of warming.

III.   *What* Does Global Warming's Occurrence *Mean* for us Humans?

1. Sea level is rising, one effect being that, because so many of the world's largest cities are located near an ocean, the time will come when mass relocations will be necessary. For example, the East Antarctic Ice Sheet (the largest ice sheet in the world)—which holds enough water to raise sea levels by 164 feet!—has been studied recently, with this finding: It "could be more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than previously thought, according to new research from Durham University." The complete melting of this ice sheet would, obviously, be catastrophic for the millions of people who live near the ocean.

2. Increased storminess, and an increase in the severity of storms, mean that there will be increasing damage, as global warming proceeds, to (a) property—and to (b) those food items derived from crops and animals. The destruction of food sources (by, e.g., wind, hail, heavy rains, etc.) will initially mean an increase in the cost of food, and eventually mean that food will be difficult to obtain. The results will be (a) disease on a large scale, along with (b) mass starvations, and (c) violence—as desperate people search for food.

3. Increased variability in weather conditions will mean that crop failures will become increasingly common, so that food will become more costly and difficult to obtain, with the same results as enumerated under point 2 above.

4. Here is a brief comment on the importance of the oceans: "The health of the ocean is essential to human survival. The ocean is a major source of food, medicine, and jobs. Fish from the ocean currently are the primary source of protein for one in six people on earth. And, nearly a million people in the US have jobs that directly depend on the ocean and that add $12 billion to our GDP." With the growing acidification of the oceans, more and more people will be deprived of not only employment but—more importantly—food. As a consequence, the increasing acidification of the oceans will be another factor that contributes to an increase in disease, starvation, and violence.

What should be clear from the above-discussed implications of global warming is that a point will likely be reached when most, if not all, of the world's societies will collapse—**a point that cannot be emphasized too strongly**. Societal collapse is nothing new in human history—as

Jared Diamond has demonstrated in his recent (and massive!) *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (2005). But whereas the societal collapses of the past have affected only *some* of the societies existing at a given time, global warming is likely to result in societal collapse on a *universal scale*—**another point that cannot be emphasized more strongly**. That global warming is a serious problem indeed should be clear from the following selection from a 2011 article:

> Professor Kevin Anderson, director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change in Britain, was quoted in The Scotsman ahead of the 2009 Copenhagen conference saying the consequences [of global warming] were ''terrifying''.
>
> ''For humanity it's a matter of life or death ... we will not make all human beings extinct, as a few people with the right sort of resources may put themselves in the right parts of the world and survive. But I think it's extremely unlikely that we wouldn't have mass death at 4 degrees.
>
> ''If you have got a population of 9 billion by 2050 and you hit 4 degrees, 5 degrees or 6 degrees, you might have half a billion people surviving.''

Here's an even more sobering statement, made by John B. Davies:

> The world is probably at the start of a runaway Greenhouse Event which will end most human life on Earth before 2040. This will occur because of a massive and rapid increase in the carbon dioxide concentration in the air which has just accelerated significantly. The increasing Greenhouse Gas concentration, the gases which cause Global Warming, will very soon cause a rapid warming of the global climate and a chaotic climate.

To say nothing of this statement from "On a planet 4C hotter, all we can prepare for is extinction," which appeared in *The Guardian* in 2008:

> We need to get prepared for four degrees of global warming, Bob Watson told the Guardian last week. At first sight this looks like wise counsel from the climate science adviser to Defra. But the idea that we could adapt to a 4C rise is absurd and dangerous. Global warming on this scale would be a catastrophe that would mean, in the immortal words that Chief Seattle probably never spoke, "the end of living and the beginning of survival" for humankind. Or perhaps the beginning of our extinction.
>
> The collapse of the polar ice caps would become inevitable, bringing long-term sea level rises of 70-80 metres. All the world's coastal plains would be lost, complete with ports, cities, transport and industrial infrastructure, and much of the world's most productive farmland. The world's geography would be transformed much as it was at the end of the last ice age, when sea levels rose by about 120 metres to create the Channel, the North Sea and Cardigan Bay out of dry land. Weather would become extreme and unpredictable, with more frequent and severe droughts, floods and hurricanes. The Earth's carrying capacity would be hugely reduced. Billions would undoubtedly die.

We cannot know for certain, of course, all of the effects of global warming—for us and other living things—but we know enough about the possible effects of global warming to know that it its ugly head is already showing, and will undoubtedly become ever more a problem. From a personal standpoint what especially concerns me about global warming is that as it is occurring it results in the thawing of permafrost, which results in the [release in methane gas](#). The significance of this is that methane is [far more potent](#) than carbon dioxide as a "greenhouse" gas—making the concept of a "[tipping point](#)" highly believable. Just *when* (i.e., what year) this tipping point will occur cannot be known with certainty, of course. But if John B. Davies (see quotation above) is correct in is assertion that it is likely to occur *before* 2040, this means that:

1. We humans have precious little to prepare for this "event."

2. Different humans are likely to develop different ideas regarding how to prepare for it.

3. Of those who *do* engage in preparatory activities of some sort, only some are likely to survive—with the possibility that no one will!

IV.   *How* Should We *Respond* to This Problem?

John B. Davies—the author of the first of the above three quotations, states, under the heading "IMMEDIATE ACTION IS CRUCIAL"—the following:

> The absolute priority is that the world's public and politicians are told about the rapidly increasing rate of carbon dioxide concentrations in the air which will cause a runaway Greenhouse Event, both in the media and in social media. The gravity of the situation needs to be accepted and all nations agree to co-operate to solve the problem.
>
> There needs to be a world conference at which all nations agree the grave situation that the world is facing and that urgent and drastic action is essential. They need to accept and agree that all nations will cut greenhouse gas emissions to an accepted and equal low level of emissions per person. This will mean that only nations with very small emissions per person like the Central African Republic will not need to make any emission cuts. The rate of increase in Carbon Dioxide needs to be cut to 2 parts per million per annum by 2015 onwards. The arctic needs to be cooled so that the sea ice does not all melt before the end of the Arctic Summer.

I have two problems with these suggestions:

1. They are not based on any clearly-articulated *principles*—and ones with a *sound basis*, of course.

2. Davies provides one with no basis for believing that his suggestions are *implementable*.

My own approach to the "what should be done" question is to begin by stating the principles that I believe should be followed—a series of opinions and facts:

1. *If* anyone survives global warming (and there is no guarantee that *anyone* will), this will be because they have abandoned their existing *way of life*—middle-class or whatever—in favor of a very different one. (Because this is difficult to do, it is reasonable to expect that few *will* do so—even if they are provided an opportunity so to do.)

2. *If* people were to adopt a new way of life in large numbers, this would have the effect of creating a New Order within the confines of the Existing Order.

3. Governments—being a part of the Existing Order—will provide no meaningful leadership in creating that New Order because of their "captivity" by the Existing Order.

4. Therefore, any leadership for creating a New Order must come from individuals—either acting as individuals or as members of groups. Conceivably, some such groups could be ones now existing (e.g., the Society of Friends—i.e., Quakers), but more realistically such groups would be ones specially created for the task of building a New Society.

Given this latter conclusion, the question arises: Specifically what do such groups (or individuals choosing to act alone) need to do? As I see it, the way of life that a given individual (or individual family) or group would need to develop would be one that would be as *self-sufficient* as possible. As the New Society develops, an opportunity for lessening the degree of self-sufficiency would likely occur. In the New Society's initial development, however, a high degree of self-sufficiency would be necessary. Why? Because the disruptions that global warming will cause in economies will make it impossible to survive unless one is able—as an individual, individual family, or individual community—to *oneself* produce that which one needs for one's survival. One will not be able to make purchases in retail stores because such stores— in, e.g., not being able to obtain items to sell—will, of necessity, go out of business.

Given the situation likely to exist when global warming unleashes its punishment ("revenge," per James Lovelock!) on us humans, I see just two options:

1. Individuals and individual families becoming homesteaders.

2. Individuals voluntarily forming themselves into eco-communities, each such community becoming as "community sufficient" as possible.

Of these two options, the second seems to me the more preferable. In several of my earlier essays (e.g., this, this (the "Community 'Talking Points'" essay in this collection), and "Eco-Communities and Work"—also in that collection) I commented at some length on the

characteristics that communities should have, in my opinion. Given this, in the present essay I wish to make just two points regarding eco-communities:

1. Except for their ecological orientation, and design with the possible ravages of global warming in mind, the eco-communities built would be in a long-standing American tradition of "communal utopias" (to allude to a book edited by Donald E. Pitzer [4]). I should add that an idea common with the "secular" communitarians is that through the creation of communities, and their proliferation, the eventual result would be a replacement of the Existing Order with a New Order.

2. My experience in playing (French horn) in the band while in secondary school, and in an orchestra while in college, leads me to believe that people can work together "in harmony," and that social class/caste systems need not develop. That rather than such systems having a basis in "human nature," they are "fruits" of the Agricultural Revolution that began around 10,000 years ago. The currently-existing settlement of Marinaleda in Spain, e.g., would seem to provide evidence that this is possible.

The relevant question here, of course, is whether or not a movement such as that advocated here will ever develop. Given that I see precious little evidence that one will, I am rather pessimistic about the human future—my five grandchildren included in that group. Pessimistic, but continuing to harbor some small measure of hope.

Endnotes

1. I have borrowed my title from Robert Heilbroner's "On the Seriousness of the Future," which appeared in the August 1963 issue of *The American Scholar* (to which I formerly subscribed). The focus of Heilbroner's article was very different from the present essay (except for his reference, on p. 559, to "our balance with nature").

2. I should make clear that in emphasizing the problem of global warming in this essay, I do not mean to minimize the importance of other problems currently and on the horizon—such as nuclear accidents. However, my focus here is on what *individuals*—acting as individuals and as members of small groups—can do to address the problems that we face, and that limitation causes me to eschew any discussion of problems such as nuclear accidents.

3. Recognizing here, of course, that at any given time surface temperature varies considerably from one location to another, and that any given location will experience temperature variations not only diurnally, but seasonally—these variations themselves varying with location.

4. Pitzer's book is just one part of an extensive literature on this aspect of American history.

On (*Our*) Living in a Fantasy World

Alton C. Thompson

In visiting internet sites, reading newspaper/magazine articles, watching television, conversing with others, etc., one gains the impression that only the *present* has relevance. True, the new television program "Almost Human" is *set* in the future—in 2048 CE. But in emphasizing "action, intrigue and humor"—and in *not* recognizing that a global warming "tipping point" could occur by 2040, or earlier [1]—the program demonstrates that it does not take the future very seriously.

For being a species that supposedly has more intelligence than any other species, humans are being incredibly stupid in taking the future so lightly. Is the problem that climate scientists have been too timid in their discussions of global warming? Have the media been negligent in reporting the findings and predictions of climate scientists? Have the "deniers" [2] been so well funded that they have been able to convince most members of the public that global warming is a hoax—or even a conspiracy?

Whatever the answer(s) to this question is, the fact of the matter that the problem of global warming is most definitely not "in the air" in this country. Even many educated people in this country seem to be unaware of the problem—or, if aware, are unconcerned about it, a fact that is almost too incredible to believe.

Several days ago I returned from a trip to Massachusetts, where our older daughter and her family live, and I had an opportunity to see my new grandson for the first time. While there, my son-in-law took me to Boston University (where he is working on an advanced degree, having already received one from Princeton University). I spent some of my time there in one of the libraries while my son-in-law busied himself with an appointment, and while in the library I thought to myself, in viewing some of the current periodicals: "Why are these people spending their time on such useless activity? Don't they realize that within a few decades they—and many others—are likely to be the victims of global warming? And as to the students attending this university, don't they realize that they are preparing for careers that will be disappearing within a few decades, and that they, too, are likely to disappear because of global warming?"

So much of what is occurring in our society currently is simply irrelevant. Some attention is being given to problems that are *current* and *obvious*, true, but little is occurring that has relevance so far as the *future* is concerned—an example being the recent Typhoon Haiyan, which can be regarded as a modern "canary in the coal mine," a sign that global warming is occurring, and hinting strongly that it's past time that we take that phenomenon seriously.

Even those working on problems that are more strictly current are seemingly deficient in their thinking about *why* those problems exist, not recognizing that **the fundamental problem that underlies virtually all of our problems—including the present/future problem of global warming—is our** *societal system*.

We have a society based on individualism [3], competition, achievement, greed, materialism, self-centeredness, etc., and the "operation" of our society is such that being "possessed" by such values has "survival value" for individual members of the society. The "survival value" that such values confer on those who hold them has two problems associated with it, however:

1. Given that those acting on the basis of such values will, of necessity, vary in their biological inheritance, life experiences, interests, intelligence, education, etc., the *outcome* obtained will vary from individual to individual—the important such variation being in *need satisfaction*. That fact is in itself a problem, and people lacking in need satisfaction will cause problems for others. Put another way, *societal problems* in the here and now is the predictable outcome for a society within which such values are dominant.

2. The "inmates" of a society dominated by such values will tend to be so present-oriented that they will be virtually unable to peer into the future, make projections into the future, and plan for the future. They will tend to simply assume that the future will be much like today, so that there is no need to give it thought.

Given these deficiencies in thought, those living in a society such as ours are prevented from grasping the fact that their *societal system* not only is the cause of the social problems that currently plague their society, but is propelling us in the direction of disaster. "Salvation"—if it exists at all!—lies in replacing the Existing Order with a New Order' but the nature of thought processes in the society are such that few will recognize this fact, and act upon it.

Problems in the society tend never to be attributed to the societal system itself but, rather, are attributed to "poor decision-making," a "bad environment," etc. They are, that is, attributed to personal attributes or to "circumstances," with never a thought given to the possibility that the *societal system itself* is the ultimate culprit. Thus, even those who today recognize the existence of the problem of global warming, tend to believe that if they recycle, insulate their dwellings well, install solar panels, drive hybrid or electric automobiles, etc., they will be "doing their part" to fight global warming. The possibility that they should, rather, be working for *societal system change* never crosses their mind.

It would appear, then, that our situation is hopeless; if members of our society ever *do* "wake up," it appears that it will be too late to do anything meaningful, so far as human survival is concerned. What especially makes our situation seem hopeless is that our *leaders* are doing nothing significant to address the problem of global warming—evidently because they are

simply stooges for special interests that are so driven by ideological notions that they are literally incapable of thinking seriously about the future.

Despite the fact that our situation appears hopeless, because there still *may* be time to save at least *some* of the human "race," it is useful to address two questions:

1. Is the creation of a New Society something that is *conceivable*?

2. If so, (a) what *form* should it take, and (b) *how* can it be created?

It appears that global warming, despite the best of our efforts, will destroy much of the world's population; but it also seems conceivable there is a "window of opportunity" such that if appropriate actions are taken during that period, at least some humans will be alive in 2100 CE—and have some semblance of a "civilized" existence. For that reason, it is worthwhile giving some attention to the above two questions.

Is The Creation of a New Society Conceivable?

If the values that I enumerated earlier were not only *dominant* in our society, but *universal*, and given the dominance of our country in the world today (which dominance may be fading somewhat, however), the extinction of our species by 2100 CE would be a *certainty*, I believe. Fortunately, however, at least two reasons exist for having some measure of hope for the human future:

1. People vary in their characteristics—including in the values by which they try to live.

2. The values enumerated earlier are contrary to "human nature."

Let me now comment briefly on each of these points.

Human Variation

Humans vary in skin color, ethnicity, education, intelligence, life experiences, interests, etc.—and in their *values*. A value-related distinction that I find of especial interest and importance is that between "industrial" and "pecuniary" employments, introduced by Thorstein Veblen in "Industrial and Pecuniary Employments" (pp. 279 – 323 in his *The Place of Science in Modern Civilisation*, 1919). [4] What I find interesting about this distinction is that it suggests that those in "industrial" employments are the *productive* members of the economy whereas those in "pecuniary" employments are mere *parasites* who live off the labor of the others.

It is those in the pecuniary employments who dominate the society—make the decisions that direct the course of the economy and society—but the fact that many of the society's members are in industrial employments suggests not only that those in the pecuniary category (a) lack a secure position in the society (by virtue of being parasites), but (b) are the members of the

society who most value individualism, etc. *That*, in turn, suggests—fortunately!—that although many in the society (i.e., those in the industrial category) may be somewhat tainted by the values "possessed" by those in the pecuniary category, this tainting is rather superficial.

As one who has lived in the United States for all 73 years of my life, I can attest to the fact that many in our society try to live by a set of values that is in opposition to the dominant values. **Were it not for this fact there would be no reason to have hope for the human future, in my opinion.** If our society—or species, indeed—is to have any savior(s), they will need to come from this "industrial" group. (I wish that I had a better name for this group, but will continue with Veblen's term until I encounter a better one.)

The Dominant Values Are Contrary to "Human Nature"

The *fact* that there are individuals in this "industrial" group gives us some reason to have hope for the future. The question here, however, is: Why should one believe that "human nature" is of a *positive*, rather than *negative*, nature? I would cite three reasons:

1. Research on our biological relatives—i.e., primatological research—gives us a basis for believing that humans are "good natured"—the title of one of Frans de Waal's books (1997). Other relevant books by de Waal include *Our Inner Ape* (2006), *The Age of Empathy* (2010) and *The Bonobo and the Atheist* (2013).

2. Anthropological studies of "primitive" peoples support this view. Consider this passage by Colin M. Turnbull (the book from which it was extracted—*The Human Cycle* (1983)—having, however, been—to be fair here—criticized by Edmund Leach) (pp. 21 – 22):

   > There are many who say that for the primitive, life was and is, in Hobbesian terms, nasty, brutish, and short. On the whole, anthropologists have found otherwise, and over the years have accumulated an enormous mass of data to support their view. This evidence is based on years of living within such societies, suffering the same deprivations, including sickness and, sometimes, premature death. If we measure a culture's worth by the longevity of its population, the sophistication of its technology, the material comforts it offers, then many primitive cultures have little to offer us, that is true. But . . . in terms of a conscious dedication to human relationships that are both affective and effective, the primitive is ahead of us all the way. He is working at it at every stage of his life, from infancy to death, while playing just as much as while praying; whether at work or at home his life is governed by his conscious quest for social order. Each individual learns this social consciousness as he grows up, and the lesson is constantly reinforced until the day he dies, and because of that social consciousness each individual is a person of worth and value and importance to society, also from the day of birth to the day of death.

3. Empirical research—such as that done at the Greater Good center at the University of California-Berkeley. Dacher Keltner is one of the researchers associated with this center; he is the author of, e.g., *Born to Be Good* (2009) and *The Compassionate Instinct* (2010)—the latter having Jason Marsh and Jeremy Adam Smith as co-authors.

A question that might arise here, of course, is: "Why does so much 'bad' behavior occur if humans are 'good' by nature?" The answer that I would provide to this question refers to the concept of a "discrepancy," so I must begin here by commenting on that concept.

The basic idea underlying this concept is that during the long period of human existence prior to the Agricultural Revolution (which began about 10,000 years ago) there occurred a co-development of humans as biological entities and their (gatherer-hunter) way of life. With the Agricultural Revolution, however, new ways of life began to develop, meaning that those individuals who "participated" in this Revolution:

1. Were exposed to a different set of stimuli than the stimuli for which their bodies had become "designed."

2. Were forced to engage in behaviors that differed from those associated with their previous way of life.

3. Were forced to use their brains in a manner that differed from how they had used them under their previous way of life.

That is, a *discrepancy* began to develop between the (a) way of life for which they had become "designed," biologically, and (b) the way of life that they were now forced (for most, members of the elite being somewhat of an exception) to live—and this discrepancy widened over time. (See Chapter 2 of this eBook for further discussion.) René Dubos has described (in 1968) the current situation this way (p. 16): "In many respects, modern man [and woman] is like a wild animal spending its life in a zoo; like the animal, he is fed abundantly and protected from inclemencies but deprived of the natural stimuli [etc.] essential for many functions of his body and his mind. Man is alienated not only from other men, not only from nature, but more importantly from the deepest layers of his fundamental self."

It is highly probable that virtually all of our problems today—including that of global warming—*could* be traced back to this Discrepancy. Interestingly, implicit in the list of 39 "Paleolithic-based prescriptions" presented by S. Boyd Eaton, *et al*., in Table XX (pp. 279 – 283) of their 1988 *The Paleolithic Prescription* is the tacit suggestion that modern life is deficient in *at least* 39 respects! If this is the case, is it any wonder that our society has so many problems?! It is easy to blind oneself to the existence of these deficiencies, but doing so does not make those deficiencies magically disappear.

What *Form* Should the New Society Take, and *How* to Create It?

I have been proceeding here under the assumption that the problem of global warming, specifically, is rooted in our societal system (which provides us with a "discrepant" way of life), so that the "obvious" solution to that problem is to develop a new societal system, one that offers its occupants (no longer inmates!) a way of life that accords well with their "design specifications" as humans.

Such a viewpoint is by no means a popular one, for we are used to thinking in terms of "tinkering" with the society, rather than changing it drastically. It is not surprising, then, that scientists Mark Z. Jacobson and Mark A. Delucchi, in a *[Scientific American](#)* article in 2009, presented "A Plan to Power 100 Percent of the Planet with Renewables"—wind, water, and solar technologies.

They claim that current knowledge is such that it is possible for *all* of the world's energy needs to be provided with renewables. I have no reason to question their claim, but would make two observations relative to it:

1. Given the existing "[climate commitment](#)," it seems likely that even if work on their "plan" were to begin *immediately*, a "[tipping point](#)" would be reached, and crossed—resulting in a rapid deterioration of atmospheric conditions, to the point that societal collapse would become a universal phenomenon, with a tremendous loss of human life.

2. What is the likelihood that work will begin "soon" on this project? My answer: Don't hold your breath!

I am convinced that the *safest* approach to the problem of global warming—to say nothing of an approach that offers an opportunity to "return" to a more "natural" way of life—is one that focuses on the creation of eco-communities. [5] Communities that would initially be small (to allow "bugs" to be worked out), but allowed to grow in size—perhaps to a maximum of 2,500. The initial communities would be designed to be as "community-sufficient" as possible, but over time neighboring communities could begin to exchange one with another—allowing each to become somewhat specialized.

As I have commented in detail in several of my earlier essays (e.g., [this](#), [this](#) {the "Community 'Talking Points'" essay in this collection}, and "Eco-Communities and Work"—also in that collection), I will say nothing further about the characteristics that communities should have here. I *will* add, however, that in 1984 I published a [strategy/scenario](#) of societal system change that featured retirees as the vanguard. I continue to accept that strategy, but should add that several months ago I sent an email to a black columnist for the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* in which I presented some of my ideas relative to global warming, and offered the suggestion that blacks might be a good candidate as a vanguard in in eco-communitarian movement. I have yet to receive a response from this gentleman!

During the nineteenth century there were a number of individuals—e.g., [Robert Owen](#), [Charles Fourier](#), [Étienne Cabet](#)—who had no difficulty conceiving a new society, and conceiving the replacement of the Existing Order with a different one. Interestingly, they were all *communitarians*—and my own thinking about societal system change has been strongly influenced by these thinkers. Would that these gentlemen were alive today! If they were, they would undoubtedly express different ideas—given, in part, that global warming is the key problem facing us humans today. But because I suspect that they would continue to espouse communalism, I suspect that they would espouse ideas closely related to my own.

With individuals of this stature promoting communal ideas, there might be a good chance that such ideas would be accepted, and acted upon, today—so that at least some people would be saved from the ravages of global warming. Their *absence* from today's scene may, however, spell our doom, I fear—given that for most people today the idea of societal system change is not even a part of their consciousness!

A final point: René Dubos (*op. cit.*, p. 196) stated, in 1968: "The impulse to withdraw from a way of life we know to be inhuman is probably so widespread that it will become a dominant social force in the future." What a dreamer!! I see little evidence of such an impulse, which makes me very pessimistic regarding the human future. *Were* such an impulse "widespread," I would be optimistic—but it is not, and therefore I fear for the human future.

Endnotes

1. Peter Cox, a climate modeler formerly with the Hadley Centre in England, is one of those who has made such a prediction. Fred Pearce has stated (2007) that (pp. 75 76) "Cox suggests that 2040 is probably when the biosphere will start taking revenge on us for relying on its accommodating nature." *[With Speed and Violence: Why Scientists Fear Tipping Points in Climate Change](#)*.

2. "Scientist" (!) Rush Limbaugh [has stated](#): "The climate science group says there's 95% certainty now that the undeniable global warming is undeniably caused by human beings. That was last week. It is a hoax. All of it. I don't know how else to say it. All of that is just wrong, and these people know it's wrong."

3. Not all individualism is of a negative nature—as my discussion of the Structured Interaction Group (in [this eBook](#)) demonstrates.

4. First published in the *Publications of the American Economic Association*, Series 3, Vol. II, 1900.

5. A point that I should emphasize here is that I do not conceive eco-communities as resembling "[doomsday castles](#)"!

The Same Old Same Old

Alton C. Thompson

Who would've thunk it! There have long been non-theist groups—members of which call themselves humanists, secularists, infidels, heathen, rationalists, free-thinkers, "freedom-from-religionists," agnostics—and/or atheists. But as of January of this year, there is now an avowedly atheist *church denomination*!

The "Sunday Assembly" is a phenomenon that owes its origin to two British comedians, Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans, "who are bringing atheists together in parts of Great Britain, Melbourne, Australia, San Diego, Nashville, and New York."

In commenting on this development, let me begin by declaring that I find atheism itself a rather peculiar mode of thought, for at least two reasons:

1. Jack Miles, in his *God: A Biography* (1995), argues that in the Hebrew Bible 24 different concepts of God can be detected—or at least that God is given 24 different *roles* in that collection of books. The question for atheists, then, is: *Which* of these concepts of God do you not believe in? If an atheist, in being asked this question, responds "*all* of them," the proper response would be: "That is a *glib* answer—in effect, a *non*-answer. Unless you give me a more specific answer, I will, of necessity, conclude that you don't really know *what* it is that you believe!" The atheist in question, having thereby being embarrassed, is likely to walk away with a sheepish look on his or her face.

2. It makes no sense to me to claim that one knows, for certain, that something—God in this case—does *not* exist. Did not William Shakespeare have Hamlet say:

   > There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
   > Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

   Are you more brilliant than Shakespeare? Can't you understand that to claim that something does *not* exist is simply foolish? A "Jabberwock," for example is a "being" that is clearly fictional. But is it not reasonable to believe that although, e.g., the god Thor was a human creation, the fact that this "hammer-wielding god [was] associated with thunder, lightning, storms, oak trees, strength," etc., imply that it was the *fact* that there *was* something "out there" in Nature that *suggested* to certain individuals that they *personify* that "something" and give it a name?—Thor, in this case.

   Now if *that* is reasonable, is it not also reasonable that the same thing occurred with the ancient Hebrews? So that the 24 different concepts of God that they created were not

simply created out of "whole cloth" but, rather, had some basis in the world as they experienced it—and their concept of God evolved over time as their knowledge and ideas developed?

To repeat, I simply cannot "wrap my mind" around the idea that it makes sense to declare, confidently, that something does *not* exist (except for obviously fictional cases, such as the Jabberwock).

The motto of Sunday Assembly is "**live better, help often, wonder more**," and its stated mission is "to help everyone find and fulfill their full potential." Sounds like a subversive organization, does it not!

Here is the Assembly's equivalent of the "Ten Commandments" (although their point 10 is a repeat of point 1!); the Sunday Assembly:

1. Is 100% [about the] celebration of life. We are born from nothing and go to nothing. Let's enjoy it together.

2. Has no doctrine. We have no set texts so we can make use of wisdom from all sources.

3. Has no deity. We don't do supernatural but we also won't tell you you're wrong if you do.

4. Is radically inclusive. Everyone is welcome, regardless of their beliefs–this is a place of love that is open and accepting.

5. Is free to attend, not-for-profit and volunteer run. We [do, however,] ask for donations to cover our costs and support our community work.

6. Has a community mission. Through our Action Heroes (you!), we will be a force for good.

7. Is independent. We do not accept sponsorship or promote outside businesses, organisations or services.

8. Is here to stay. With your involvement, The Sunday Assembly will make the world a better place.

9. We won't tell you how to live, but will try to help you do it as well as you can.

10. And remember point 1… The Sunday Assembly is a celebration of the one life we know we have.

Related to this, some members of the American Atheists group—founded by Madalyn Murray O'Hair—recently unveiled the first public monument to atheism in a square outside the Bradford County courthouse in Starke, Florida, near Jacksonville. The five-foot-long, gray granite bench and connecting pillar, which were built and engraved by local masons using granite quarried in Georgia, features secular quotes from the Founding Fathers, as well as a statement from the organization's founder, encapsulating the 50-year-old group's views:

An atheist believes that a hospital should be built instead of a church. An atheist believes that deed must be done instead of prayer. An atheist strives for involvement in life and not escape into death. He wants disease conquered, poverty banished, war eliminated.

What strikes me about these statements of goals/values is their relationship to two of my favorite passages in the (Christian) Bible, one being this one from Luke (10:25 – 37):

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

27 He [i.e., the "expert"] answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'[a]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b]"

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

And this passage from the Gospel of John (8:1 – 11):

1 but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

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But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. [7] When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." [8] Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

[9] At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. [10] Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

[11] "No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

What's notable about these two passages is that they are both *stories*, rather than, e.g., *injunctions*—the first being a story said to have been told *by* Jesus, the .second one told *about* him. Whether these stories have any historical basis is a matter that does not concern me here. What I would point out that both can be perceived as *teaching devices* that appeal to both one's mind and one's emotions—thereby (a) "convicting" the reader (and—implicitly—the Teachers/Pharisees referred to in the second story), (b) thereby increasing the likelihood that the reader will both *remember* the story, and *act* upon it, (c) encouraging the reader to give the stories an interpretation that is meaningful to *the reader*, (d) with that interpretation *changing* over time as the individual matures.

These brilliantly-constructed stories are ones that "grab" the reader, and teach in a way that, e.g., the Ten Commandments—or the Sunday Assembly's ten principles, for that matter—simply cannot. And what I find of especial interest about these stories is that:

1. They are anything but doctrinaire—rather, encouraging any given reader to interpret the story in *his or her own way*.

2. Although God plays a role in the first story, the emphasis in *both* stories is the teaching that one should not only love the neighbor, but *define* "neighbor" in extremely broad terms.

The way that I perceive these two stories is entirely compatible with the philosophical position of the Sunday Assembly—except that rather than denying the *existence* of God, I prefer to retain the *word*, but leave it undefined. Or, if I give "God" any meaning, I tend to think of God as "the mystery of the world." [1]

Granted that Sunday Assembly is too new to have adopted definitive characteristics (for some comments on the Assembly, as it currently is, see this, e.g.), but from what I have learned about Sunday Assembly to this point, I would make the following negative comments:

1. Its members seem intent on retaining the meeting structure common to most Christian churches [2] (the meetings of members of the Society of Friends—i.e., the "Quakers"—

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being a notable exception; I have attended two of their meetings here in Milwaukee). As I read the Christian New Testament I perceive no justification for how most traditional church meetings (they are not "services," I was reminded by a Quaker after attending a Quaker meeting—because no *service* occurs during meetings! [3]) are organized—but *do* perceive a Biblical basis for Quaker meetings (in, e.g., John 14:16 – 17).

It seems to me that if the intent of a church is to promote *spirituality*, rather than *religiosity*, it will structure meetings as the Quakers do—or as would be involved with the New Word Fellowship (NeWF) that I discuss in my *A Religion for Today*. The traditional structure, with its various pointless activities, seems to me to favor the development of bureaucracies, and thereby tends to promote mere religiosity—often of a very rigid character. The fact that it promotes the development of bureaucracies gives one the impression that the primary purpose in creating churches is to provide employment for certain people! Employment that is not only unnecessary, but that promotes religiosity at the expense of spirituality.

Is it surprising, then, that Christianity is such a miserable failure, so far as the promotion of spirituality is concerned?

2. I perceive no evidence that Sunday Assembly has an orientation to the *future*—and to the threat posed to us humans by, e.g., global warming. It appears to me that the design of Sunday Assembly is such as to promote sociability with like-minded others (especially—but not exclusively—others who are atheists!), with that socialization leading to the development of ideas for "service projects," and the implementation of such projects. That is all "fine and dandy" (as one of my colleagues is fond of saying), but the Assembly is, I believe, "missing the boat" in not having an orientation to the future.

I continue to be a "believer" in the NeWF because it is (a) open to anyone who agrees to abide by its "ground rules," so that it can include Christians, Jews, Muslims, agnostics, atheists, etc., (b) is designed to promote spirituality, rather than religiosity, in those who participate, and (c) encourages participants to express their honestly-held views—in a "safe" environment—including their views regarding the future, and how to respond to future eventualities.

Endnotes

1. It should be obvious that "God" is an entity whose existence is, and has been, inferred from natural "events" for which an explanation has been desired. That inference has taken the form of *personification* because humans have recognized their own actions as a cause, and therefore reasoned that the entity causing events in Nature whose explanation they seek must be like them, but more powerful—i.e., supernatural.

Thus, although in their religions humans have asserted that God created humans, the truth is that humans created God. Let me qualify that by stating that early societies for which there was a *single* environmental element that was dominant (the sun, in most cases) created *a* God (i.e., were monotheistic), whereas societies for which *several* environmental elements were of importance created *several* gods (i.e., were polytheistic).

Genesis 1:26 – 27 may state that "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, . . .'" but what must be kept in mind is that this passage was written by a *human(s)*—a *man or men*, specifically—so that it is understandable why the passage has the causation reversed.

I might note here that Genesis has two creation stories, and a different concept of God is associated with each story. *Elohim* (or "El") is the name for the God in the initial story (the one from which the above quotation was taken), with *Yahweh* being the name for God in the second story (located in Genesis 2:4 – 24). This fact of two different concepts of God in Genesis adds weight to the argument that God—as God has been *conceived*, that is—is a human creation.

2. This is the basis for the "same old same old" in my title.

3. The Quaker in question informed me that "service" is something that they do *after* their meetings!

The Meaning of "Climate Change"

Alton C. Thompson

There has been a tendency lately of using "global warming" and "climate change" in a manner that suggests that they refer to the same phenomenon—i.e., they have identical referents. Or, "climate change" is said to be occurring, and occurring *because* of global warming—which usage suggests that (a) "climate change" is the *only* atmospheric consequence of global warming, so that (b) because of that fact, it is reasonable to equate "climate change" with global warming. However, a more accurate view is to state that:

1. Global warming *is* occurring, in the sense that there is currently a warming trend, so far as the average of surface temperatures on the earth is concerned.

2. Global warming is causing *increasing atmospheric instability*, but is not *thereby* causing "climate change."

3. For that reason it is incorrect to equate "global warming" and "climate change." (I must therefore apologize for suggesting as much in my "The Inevitability of Climate Change"! I hereby assert a right to change my mind, when necessary!)

A question that arises from these points: Is, then, "climate change" a meaningful concept (a) in *today's* world—or (b) is it only (or even) a meaningful concept in terms of *geological* time? To answer these questions, it is first necessary to clarify the meaning of "climate," so let us begin with that matter.

The meaning of "global warming" is rather straightforward, for it refers to a *trend* in warming (at the earth's surface), "warming" here understood as referring to the mean surface temperature of the world increasing—in *trend* terms—over time. For a *given* year there is just *one* global mean value; however, for that same year one cannot say that earth has just one *climate*. Rather, different *places* on the earth's surface have different climates—*if*, that is, they *have* a climate. This, then, is *one* difference between "global warming" and "climate change."

Under what circumstances can we say that a given location *has* a climate? This may seem to be a rather odd question to ask, but the fact of the matter is that a given place *need not have a climate*. We have here, then, two questions that need attention:

1. Under what circumstances is it permissible to say that a given place has a climate?

2. If, in fact, at some given point in time it is permissible to say that climates exist, why is it that *different* climates exist?

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Once we answer those two questions we will be in a position to indicate what "climate change" might mean, and why it is inappropriate to assert that "climate change" is occurring *now*.

The Meaning of "Climate"

Two fundamental facts about our earth are that (a) it *rotates* on an *axis* (thereby creating day and night), and that it also, while rotating, simultaneously (b) *revolves* around our sun (doing so following the *plane of revolution*), and we have given the word "year" to a *complete* revolution.

The term "climate" pertains to, and only to, *atmospheric phenomena*—i.e., temperature, humidity, precipitation (in its various forms—such as rain and snow), wind, etc.—and involves the comparison of a given year with "neighboring" years. For a given place (a) if there is a *pattern* of atmospheric phenomena that (b) is *repeated* year after year, for a "meaningful" (in human terms) period of time, that place can be said to have a "climate." The repetition of a given pattern need not involve *perfect* correlation, of course, but must involve a "high" correlation.

Disruptions *can* occur—and *have* occurred—in the pattern of atmospheric phenomena associated with a given area—such as the "*little ice age*" that afflicted the world between roughly 1350 CE and 1850 CE. And although such disruptions have had significance for human life, they have not been so severe—so far!—as to make human life impossible during those periods. Such periods in the past have affected some parts of the world more than others; the global warming that is currently occurring, however, is likely to impact people everywhere.

If, for all places on earth, the pattern of atmospheric phenomena for a given year were radically different from year to year, it is doubtful that earth could support human (or other) life. For the production of the food—especially via agriculture—needed for human survival would be difficult, if not impossible, were the *lack* of relative regularity, from year to year, the norm. For that reason, the fact that earth has *had* climates has been important for our survival. In fact, if the earth had always *lacked* climates, it is doubtful that the human species (to say nothing of other species) could have arisen!

Which brings us to the question: *Why* do different climates exist?

Why There Are Different Climates

Other than the existence of major water bodies (e.g., the oceans), there are two factors of relevance for explaining why there are *different* climates:

1. Differences in latitude.

2. The fact that the earth is *tilted* on its axis, relative to the plane of revolution, by about 23 ½°.

The Assumption of No Tilting

Let us first assume that *no* such tilting occurs, so that only latitude has relevance. In this case length of day would be the same for every place on earth—12 hours of daylight, 12 hours of night—this being true *every* day. However, with increasing latitude the sun angle (referring to the noon sun) would decrease, from directly overhead at the Equator to being on the horizon at either pole. This fact of decreasing sun angle would mean that average annual temperature would tend to decrease with increasing distance, latitudinally, from the Equator. Moving air masses would affect day-to-day temperatures, as well as precipitation and wind, but nowhere would true *seasonality* exist. That is, at no location would the atmospheric conditions at one time of year differ significantly from atmospheric conditions at other times of year.

Every location would, however, have a "climate" in the sense that one year would be much like the next, or preceding, one in terms of atmospheric conditions—but with *average* temperature tending to decrease away from the Equator.

The Relevance of Earth's Tilting

The above discussion assumed a *hypothetical* situation—that the earth, in revolving around our sun, is perpendicular to the plane of revolution. That is a false assumption, of course, for the earth is, in fact, (a) tilted about 23 ½° relative to the plane of revolution, with (b) the axis at one position being approximately parallel to the axis at any other position.

These two facts together mean that for any given location:

1. *Length of day* varies during the course of the year. A location directly on the Equator experiences a shift (referring here to the noon sun) of 23 ½° during the course of a year— the noon sun being in the northern hemisphere for half of the year, and in the southern hemisphere for the other half of the year.

   For those of us living between the Tropic of Cancer (23 ½° north latitude)—or Tropic of Capricorn (23 ½° south latitude)—and the Arctic Circle (66 ½° north latitude)—or Antarctic Circle (66 ½° south latitude)—however, a 47° degree variation in the noon sun is experienced. This means that those of us living in the "middle" latitudes experience a much greater variation in length of day than do those living in the tropics.

2. The days are longest when the noon sun is directly overhead, and shortest when the sun is lowest on the horizon. The combination of longer day with more direct sun's rays means that a high *level of solar radiation* (i.e., "insolation") is received during that period—so that temperatures are greatest. The converse is true when the days are shortest. For those in the middle latitudes, then, more variation in temperature is experienced during the course of a year than for those located in the tropics.

It should be clear from the above discussion that the tilting of our earth on its axis results in more variation, from place to place, in atmospheric characteristics than would exist otherwise (see Figure 7 in this article showing this graphically). However, the regularity that exists in the system means that for a given location the pattern of atmospheric phenomena for one year tends to be much like that for "neighboring" years—meaning that it *has* a climate, and *retains* that climate over time.

There are climate *types* (here is collection of maps of such, and also see this for a discussion of the topic), but addressing that topic is beyond the scope of the present essay. Rather, I wish to note that although global warming is currently occurring—basically as a result of our burning of fossil fuels and deforestation—because of an increased "greenhouse effect" precipitated by human activities—it is, nonetheless, incorrect to state that global warming is resulting in "climate change." What global warming is doing, rather, is resulting in greater *variability* in weather conditions—more variability at some locations than others, of course (along with a trend toward more storminess, and more severe storms).

What increased variability means is decreased *predictability*—decreased *regularity*. Given that it is *regularity* that is the hallmark of a climate, what decreased regularity means (in human scale terms) is not "climate change" but, rather, a process of (what might be called) "declimatization"!

If "climate change" were occurring, this would imply that, if climate types were to be mapped, the *boundaries* of climate types would be gradually changing over time—but the *nature* of any given climate type would remain relatively constant. *But that's not what's occurring.* What is occurring, rather, is greater variability in atmospheric phenomena (that variation varying geographically, of course), rendering the very *concept* of "climate" increasingly meaningless. Put another way, "climate" is increasingly becoming like "unicorn"—in being non-existent (or at least fading away, like the Cheshire cat, whose smile was the first to go!).

From the standpoint of *geologic* time it's likely that climate change *has* occurred (i.e., that the change that has occurred has been gradual enough that the climatic system has been able to adjust without significant periods of irregularity). But our concern today should not be with what has occurred in the distant *past* but, rather, with what is occurring *now*—for our continued existence as a species may very well depend on this.

What's unfortunate about this is that either we (a) may *not* act, (b) may act *too late*, or (c) act *inappropriately*—thereby dooming us. If the latter happens, Nature's response—given that "Nature bats last"—may very well be: "Good riddance!"

The Ecology of USan Society

Alton C. Thompson

[Note: The "US" in "USan" refers to the "United States."]

Ecology is a science that identifies, and then studies, interrelationships in Nature—especially those interrelationships that exist between life-forms and their environment, and between different species (i.e., *inter*-specietal relationships).

So far as inter-specietal relationships are concerned, three types are recognized:

1. *Mutualistic*—the relationship is mutually beneficial to both species, as members of one species interact with members of another species.

2. *Commensal*—the relationship between two given species is neither beneficial nor harmful to either species.

3. *Parasitic*—the relationship is beneficial to one species, but that benefit is at the expense of another species.

These concepts have some relevance for humans, but before discussing that relevance it will be useful to make several *general* comments about humans:

1. Individual members of that species tend to live in groups—i.e., in *societies*—rather than as isolates (e.g., "hermits").

2. Human societies are, like those of (other) animal species, *systems*—in that they consist of parts (the human individuals in them being the fundamental parts), with those human parts being interrelated.

3. Unlike other species, the interrelationships in human societies tend to be characterized by a certain "looseness" from a systems perspective. That is, the "meshing" of the human parts of the societal system does not necessarily occur in a harmonious manner. In fact, since the "Fall" (into agriculture—with the Agricultural Revolution), *dis*harmony has been a common feature of human societal systems.

One way to view that lack of perfect harmony is to say that some members of a given society tend to be *parasitic* relative to the other members—who, therefore, can be identified as the *host* portion of the societal system. Parasitism with humans differs, however, in certain important respects from parasitism in the rest of Nature:

1. Whereas in Nature parasitism occurs on an *inter*-species level, with humans it occurs on an *intra*-species level. That is, when parasitism occurs in Nature, *one* species acts as a parasite with reference to *another* species. With humans, however, insofar as parasitism occurs, it does so *within* the human species. Although those who engage in parasitic behavior may regard the members of their host with disdain—to the point of being members of a different "race," if not species, [1] the fact of the matter, however, is that both parasite and host are members of the *same* species.

   There is, of course, irony in parasitism with humans in that the species capable of *praying* is also capable of *preying* (!)—with some members of the species preying on other members of the same species, unlike what occurs in the rest of Nature.

2. In Nature, the removal of a parasite from its host would be beneficial to the host—for the host is (unlike the parasite) in no way dependent upon the parasite. [2] With humans, however, there developed a *mutual dependence* between parasite and host—with, however, the parasitic element always being in the position of "pulling the strings." This "pulling" has a historical dimension in that over time the actions of the parasitic element have tended to change the *structure* of the society so as to make the host portion increasingly dependent on it. In the early stages of this development the host could easily do without the parasites, but over time changes in the structure of the society resulted in the host becomes increasingly dependent on the parasites—whereas those in the parasitic group have *never* been able to survive without their host.

3. In part, parasitism is *indirect*, rather than direct. For example, recently, while preparing to go to work, a real estate agent on the television set was discussing, in glowing terms, a mansion in the Oconomowoc area (just west of Milwaukee) that had been built for the [Montgomery Ward](#) family years ago, that was currently featured in [*Architectural Digest*](#), and will likely sell for around $3.6 million. As the real estate agent was speaking, he impressed me as just another American inflicted with selfishness and materialism, with the mansion that he was describing representing the same values. In the case of Montgomery Ward, had he been "possessed," rather, by a "higher" ethic, he would have used his wealth to help others in need; however, he chose to be a parasite not only in overcharging his customers but in withholding his "earnings" from those in need—so that he and his family members could wallow in luxury.

With humans, then, parasitism exists, but differs in several respects from parasitism as it occurs elsewhere in Nature. A question, however, that can be raised with parasitism as it manifests itself with humans—a species whose members have both consciousness and self-awareness (among other attributes)—is this:

Why does the host *allow* the parasites to be parasites? Certainly it is not to their *interests* to allow this to happen so why, then, do they allow others to be parasitic with reference to them?

I will suggest here that *several* factors explain why members of the host group do not "throw off" the parasites who are sucking out their blood:

1. Members of the parasitic group have created various diversions—television, movies, sports, popular music—that not only make money for them, but which help turn the attention of host people from the workings of the society. Insofar as this strategy "works," host people lack *awareness* of their being host people.

   (Ironically, those in the parasitic group also create diversions—e.g., "high" culture, horse racing, yachts, polo, etc.—to divert *their own attention* from the impacts of their actions, which enables them to pursue their parasitic activities with a clear conscience—e.g., as "good Christians.")

2. Our society's "educational" institutions—defined broadly to include secondary schools, colleges, newspapers, television, magazines, etc.—not only fail to inform those who use them regarding the workings of our society, but tend to *mis*inform them. The pathetic nature of our mass media was illustrated recently by "eminent" "journalist" Bob Schieffer's failure to play "hard ball" with Michael Hayden of the National Security Agency. [3]

   Relative to this, noted intellectual Noam Chomsky (famous for, e.g., *his Manufacturing Consent*, 1998) has stated the following:

   > One of the striking examples was the invasion of Iraq. U.S. and British intelligence agencies informed their governments that the invasion of Iraq was likely to lead to an increase in terrorism. They didn't care. In fact, it did. Terrorism increased by a factor of seven the first year after the Iraqi invasion, according to government statistics. Right now the government is defending the massive surveillance operation. That's on the front pages. The defense is on grounds that we have to do it to apprehend terrorists.
   >
   > If there were a free press—an authentic free press—the headlines would be ridiculing this claim on the grounds that policy is designed in such a way that it amplifies the terrorist risk. But you can't find that, which is one of innumerable indications of how far we are from anything that might be called a free press.

   Earlier in his speech, Chomsky had said this:

According to received doctrine, we live in capitalist democracies, which are the best possible system, despite some flaws. There's been an interesting debate over the years about the relation between capitalism and democracy, for example, are they even compatible? I won't be pursuing this because I'd like to discuss a different system—what we could call the "really existing capitalist democracy", RECD for short, pronounced "wrecked" by accident. [!!!]

3. One in growing up in this society tends to acquire the belief that this is a society that features equality of opportunity, so that the conditions exist that enable one to "pull oneself up by one's bootstraps" if one tries. Given the existence of this feature of our society, the inequality that exists in the society is the result of (a) some people taking advantage of this opportunity, and (b) others *not* doing so. Those in the host population who accept this mythology tend, therefore, to blame themselves for being a part of the society's host component.

4. Members of the parasitic group are touted (by them!) as the society's "job creators," thereby suggesting that they are the society's key members. This argument does, of course, have some merit—given that they have "fixed" the societal system to make host people increasingly dependent on them. That fact does not, though, change the fact that members of the host population are being exploited—are, as Karl Marx put it, creating "surplus value" that is expropriated by others.

5. Members of the host group have the same sex drive as parasitic people, and as a result tend to have children at a time in their lives when they have little or no inkling that they are members of the host group. Once they *do* become aware of this fact—*if* they do, that is—the fact that they have the responsibility of child care puts them in a position where they are forced to attend to the duties of child care rather than give thought to how they might extricate themselves from their host position. [4]

6. Members of the host population lacking such responsibilities, in becoming aware of their position as members of the host group—and given their recognition of their dependent position—may be unable to identify an "escape" solution. In not being able to do so, they resign themselves to their status as host people—perhaps in ways that have deleterious implications for their functioning (e.g., drug-taking, heavy drinking), which actions further reduce their ability to escape.

7. It may occur to some that there *is* an escape option, but that it is not a very attractive one—that of suicide. Therefore, it is an option taken by few.

The results of the above are that some members of the host go through life not recognizing that they are host people, or dimly aware of being host people, but resigned to that fact. Others become conscious of being host people, but are not able to identify an escape route, and engage in activities that diminish their ability to either identify one or act on one. Still others may decide to homestead, and act on that decision, or join an existing "intentional" community.

The distinctions discussed above, relative to the host, can be outlined as follows:

A. Unaware of being in the host group:

1. Because of being uninformed and/or misinformed regarding the "workings" of the society.

2. Because one's attention has been diverted from the "workings" of the society.

B. Aware of being in host group:

1. Acquiesce to that fact:

a. Blame oneself (accept "equality of opportunity myth).

b. Actual physical dependence on parasitic group, combined with exposure to propaganda that that group is the "job creator" group.

2. Resent their "placement" in the host group:

a. Hindered from acting on resentment by:

1) Fact of family responsibilities.

2) Unawareness of appropriate alternate course of action.

b. Act on resentment by:

1) Becoming a homesteader.

2) Joining an existing intentional community, or joing with like-minded others to create one.

3) Suiciding.

The societal trend today is for wealth and power becoming concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, with those doing the concentrating not seeming to be aware of the possible consequences of their actions. As the host population grows, however, and more and more in that group lead

lives of "quiet desperation," what seems likely to me is that an "explosion" will eventually occur—violence will become increasingly common with host people. (See this article on increasing anger in our society.)

My hope, however, is that leadership will emerge—and soon—for an eco-communitarian movement, which should become increasingly attractive to members of the host group. Should such leadership emerge, the fact of growing misery in the host group could be a good thing, because it could ensure success of an eco-communitarian movement—thereby saving more people than would otherwise be saved from the ravages that global warming will soon be inflicting on us. Such people could then not only be survivors, but be involved in creating a New Society—one of a "primal" nature in not having parasitic and host elements.

My reference here to "global warming" means, of course, that the parasitism that exists with humans is not confined to their relationships with other humans; it also involves their relationship with Earth itself. Given that "nature bats last," the parasites in charge of our society had better come to recognize that their "reign" is in jeopardy, and that when the "grim reaper" (the "scythe-wielding personification of death") of global warming begins acting, *they* will be among the victims along with the rest of us!

Endnotes

1. This point was made recently in the movie *12 Years a Slave*, based on the life experiences of a free black man—Solomon Northup—who was kidnapped in 1841, and then sold into slavery. After being rescued from slavery, Northup wrote a book about his experiences, *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853). One should keep in mind that abuse can take both active and passive (e.g., neglect) forms, with today's high level of employment being somewhat of an equivalent to yesterday's slavery. Serving as "cannon fodder" for the ("rabid") parasitic ruling class involves the ultimate abuse, of course.

2. It should be noted, though, that the distinction between a parasitic relationship and a commensal one is not always clear-cut—in that at times a parasite can provide some benefit to its host; see this, e.g.

3. One could also argue that "thought control" is occurring, if but in an unplanned manner.

4. If members of the host group would (a) recognize their existence as a group and then decide (b) that the best solution to the problem was to not make their children victims of the situation, so that (c) they jointly resolved not to have children, and (d) acted on that joint decision, over time the host population would decline to a point causing societal collapse—unless the parasitic group undertook a program to recruit immigrants from other countries to become a host group.

An Offensive Cartoon

Alton C. Thompson

No, I'm not referring to Andy Singer's "Angle of God" cartoon that appeared on this site recently: Although I'm sure that some would be offended by that cartoon, I found it to be clever and humorous.

The cartoon to which I'm referring here is the one that appears to the left—one by a David Horsey that appeared initially in the *Los Angeles Times*, and was reprinted in the November 17 issue of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (among other newspapers, I would guess).

I assume that the message that Horsey was trying to convey with this cartoon is that Typhoon Haiyan, which recently devastated the Philippines, was caused by global warming—so that global warming deniers should be ashamed of themselves for denying global warming.

In that an increase in severe storms, and an increase in their number, are both phenomena that would be consistent with global warming, it is highly probable that this particular typhoon *was* a result of global warming (as was the severe storm on November 17 that caused so much damage, and the loss of several lives, in the part of the United States where I live). Thus, Horsey was correct to connect Typhoon Haiyan with global warming (although, actually, he attributes it to "climate change," a concept with a different meaning—a point that I will not elaborate on here).

The cartoon seems to convey two additional messages, however: That (a) "climate change deniers" bear some responsibility for this typhoon, and the devastation it caused, and also that (b) these deniers have been gloating about the loss of life and property damage in the Philippines that resulted from this storm.

Certainly those who deny that global warming is occurring bear some responsibility for this typhoon, but it would be far more accurate to state that it is us *Westerners*—residents of the United States in particular—who are most responsible for this typhoon. This includes not only deniers, but the rest of us as well, of course. For it is us Westerners who are primarily

responsible for the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation—the two principal causes of an increasing concentration of "greenhouse" gases, this increasing concentration resulting in global warming.

The victims in this tragedy bear little responsibility for it. Indeed, a terrible irony associated with global warming today is that those areas of the world that may feel the effects of global warming first and most, are those *least* responsible for it!

The "Climate Change Deniers" character in the cartoon has a callous grin on his face, while the individuals representing the Philippines have suffering written on their faces. I find the juxtaposition of these two incongruous images insensitive, and am also offended by the grin on the character's face—for global warming is no laughing matter: The death toll that occurred in the Philippines was huge, but global warming is likely to cause infinitely *more* deaths in the future. Granted that "infinitely" is an exaggeration, but some scientists are projecting a culling of 90% of the world's population within the next few decades.

Several questions occur to me regarding this cartoon:

- Why did Mr. Horsey *create* this cartoon?

- Why did the *Los Angeles Times* choose to *print* it?

- Why did the *Milwaukee Urinal* (and perhaps other newspapers) choose to *reprint* it?

I suspect that the answer to all three questions is (a) ignorance, (b) poor judgment—or (c) both!

Present and Future Health

Alton C. Thompson

The World Health Organization gives the following figures for the top 10 causes of death in the world in 2011:

The 10 leading causes of death in the world
2011
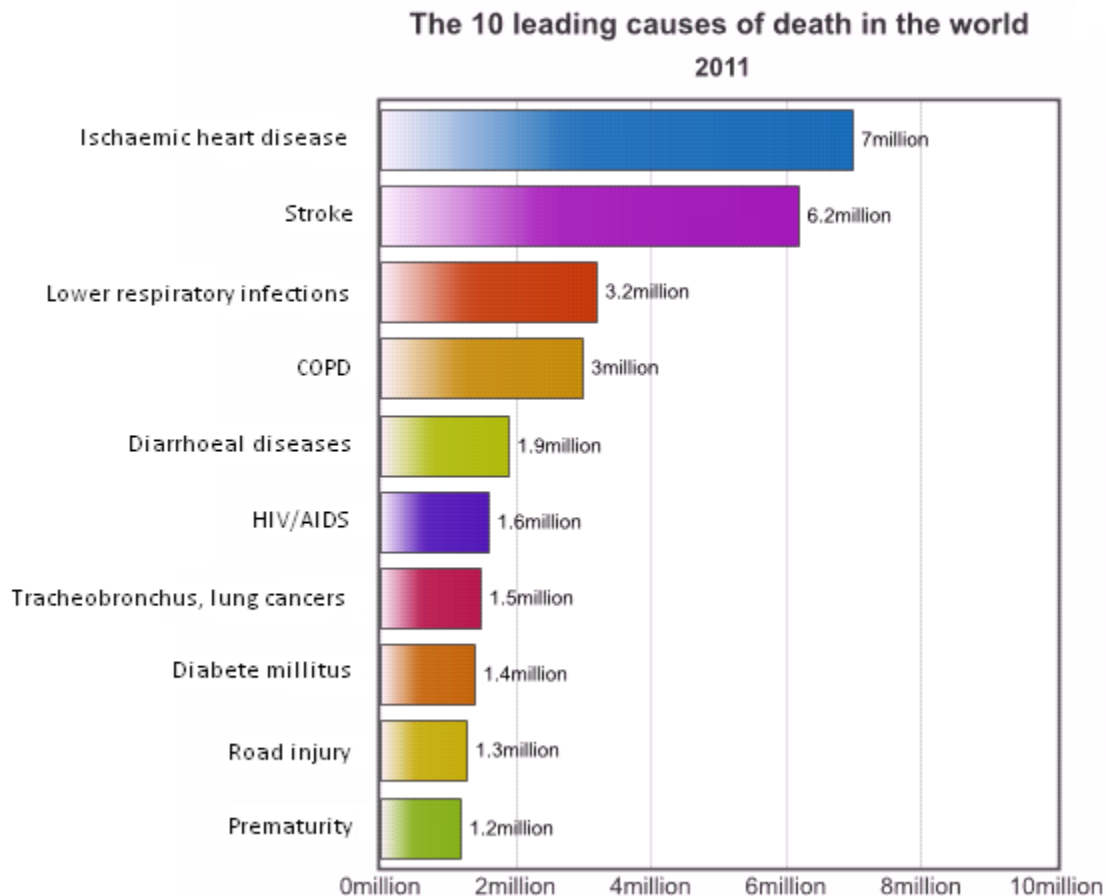
(Most of the terms here are fairly well-known, but less well-known terms are: "Ischaemic heart disease," which is another name for coronary heart disease; COPD stands for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease; and "Prematurity" refers to the death of babies born prematurely (i.e., prior to 37 weeks before gestation), who die from complications related to their premature birth.)

I should add to this list that in the United States, at least, doctors are the third-leading cause of death—with 225,000 deaths each year from iatrogenic causes! And on top of this there is the obscene high cost of medical care in this country:

This year alone [2013], we are likely to spend over $2.8 trillion on health care. We spend more than twice as much on a per capita basis as other high-income countries such as England and France. Indeed, as an article in the Financial Times recently noted, the U.S. spends over 18 percent of its gross domestic product on health, compared to 12 percent by France, which comes next. Our system costs 100 percent more per capita than in Canada and 150 percent more than in the U.K. In exchange, you might expect to see longer life expectancy and lower infant mortality. Just the opposite. Fewer Americans live above the age of 70 and more American babies die at birth than in these other countries.

Ah! What a great place to live!

My objective here, however, is not to discuss causes of death and the miserable "sickness care" situation in this country. What infuriates me especially about what health professionals do in this country is that their orientation is to the *treatment* of people with health problems rather than to the *prevention* of health problems in the first place. If their orientation *were* to the latter rather than the former, our citizens would live healthier lives, and diseases would be much less common—so that our *need* for doctors and hospitals would decline precipitously. And fewer would die at the hands of doctors!

The question that arises here, however, is: Although it is *conceivable* that most health professionals would have such an orientation in our country, is it *possible*? For me, the "obvious" answer to that question is a resounding **NO**!

One can argue, I suppose, that whatever health problems an individual has in our society are a consequence of that person's personal *decisions*—e.g., eating too much "junk food," not exercising enough, developing bad habits (such as cigarette smoking, etc.). However, the *behaviors* of a member of any society tend to be more a result of *societal norms* and various *societal characteristics* (such as the nature of work, the geographical distribution of jobs relative to places of residence, etc.) than of "free choice." That is, much of the behavior that one engages in is a result of *societal pressures* and (virtual) necessity rather than choice *per se*.

An implication of that fact, from a health standpoint, is that many of one's behaviors (or non-behaviors—such as lack of exercise) that result in ill-health (or accidents) are a function of one's *way of life* rather than "free choice." Granted that one has *some* control over one's *lifestyle* (defined here as what one does during one's "off" hours), but one's *way of life* is imposed on one by the society within which one lives, so that it is the *way of life*—and, to a lesser degree, the *lifestyle* that one has chosen—that plays the *dominant* role in the degree to which one is healthy.

The *particulars* of one's way of life vary from person to person, of course, and *that* fact has an impact on one's health—as does, e.g., one's genetic inheritance. A society's *general* way of life (e.g., urban-industrial, agricultural), however, has more impact on one's health than do other factors—including individual "choice."

If this assessment is correct, the implication is that *there is no reason to expect any improvement in the health situation in this country*—unless there is significant change in our societal system. I am reluctant to use the word "fortunately" here, but the fact of the matter is *societal system change in our society is virtually inevitable* in the near future—thereby opening the possibility of a better health system emerging in this country.

What I am referring to here is the likelihood that global warming will be causing societal collapse, with an accompanying horrendous loss of human life, here and elsewhere within the next few decades, if not years. *If*, however, there is an effort soon to create a New Society within the "shell" of the Existing Order, at least some individuals/families may be able to escape the ravages of global warming.

And *if*, in designing that New Society, they supply it with institutions that are compatible with our "design specifications" as humans (see, e.g., pp. 38 – 117 in this), it's likely that both good *physical* health and good *mental* health will be commonplace in that society.

It's also possible, of course, that humans will go the way of the dinosaurs as a consequence of global warming. Perhaps that would be just as well!

What Fools These Mortals Be!

Alton C. Thompson

"Lord, what fools these mortals be!" This famous line, spoken by Puck to Oberon (king of the fairies) in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (p. 31), was prompted by the antics of Lysander—who, with Demetrius, was in love with Hermia.

Being in love is a kind of "high" that involves a sort of "possession." As such, it causes one to *perceive* things—not just the loved one—in a non-normal manner, what might perhaps be termed an *overly-optimistic* manner. As a result, one does not *perceive* things realistically, and one's *behavior* may be perceived as "foolish" by others at times. *Being* in love does, however, fulfill a biological function—that of ensuring that the human species will continue.

If the "possession" associated with being in love serves a useful purpose—and is pleasurable for those directly involved (if not necessarily for others!)—it does not follow from that fact that all sorts of "possession" are useful. For example, dissociative identity disorder—what formerly often went under the name "demon possession"—is a psychological condition that prevents one from functioning in a normal manner, thereby making one's own survival difficult, and adding pain to one's relatives and friends.

There is, however, a more serious form of "possession," one not recognized by psychiatrists as a psychological condition because it is so common. What makes this condition so serious is that those "possessed" by it are, as a result of that "possession," virtually forced to focus their attention solely on the present and near-term future. People so possessed, even if they do peer into the future, are unable to look *realistically* into the future, nor are they able to recognize how their current actions might *impact* the future.

What I am referring to here is possession by an ideology—and in the modern world at least two rather different ideologies have been playing an important role, one secular, one religious. The secular one is that of laissez-faire—the idea (briefly—for a more extended discussion, see this, e.g.) that if people are allowed to pursue their economic interests unhindered, the "market" will ensure that things and services of the right types (i.e., those "demanded") will be produced, and in the right quantities. Thus, by individuals pursuing their *selfish* interests, the *general welfare* will be achieved—i.e., *everyone* will benefit.

This "philosophy" not only neglects the *empirical* reality that people differ in their abilities and interests, but also makes the "market" a god-like being, in effect. As a result, those possessed by this ideology, because of the "faith" that they place in the "market," feel no need to look realistically into the future—for, after all, the "market" will ensure that everything is "hunky

dory." That *not* looking realistically into the future is foolish goes without saying, of course; but for one possessed by this ideology that possibility is beyond their ability to recognize.

In perceiving the "market" as a sort of "savior," a corollary here is that government can *only* "interfere" in the economic realm (for "*laissez-faire*" literally means "let do"—i.e., "let people 'do their thing' without governmental interference"). Therefore, people possessed by this ideology tend to promote a largely passive government—except, ironically, when it comes to supporting military "adventures" abroad!—even when it is clearly *against* their interests so to do—from both short-run and long-run standpoints.

The *religious* ideology of importance is one that devalues present reality in favor of a (supposed) blissful future afterlife—if, that is, one acts "properly" from day to day, and adheres to a certain set of beliefs. One has no worries about what the world will be like 10, 20, 30 years, etc. "down the road," because one has a fixation on a blissful afterlife.

Possession by some sort of ideology is not, of course, the only reason why so many people fail to look realistically into the future. In addition:

- People tend to be so busy with their everyday lives that they simply have little time to read what experts are saying about the future, and the dangers that lie ahead.

- The news media—newspapers, radio/television news programs—help focus one's attention on "current events" rather than future possibilities.

- The entertainment industry diverts one's attention from what is important about either what is *currently* occurring (e.g., our military "adventurism"—a term which makes the killing of innocents seem romantic), or what is *likely* for the near future.

As a consequence of the above factors, few in our society—and elsewhere, I suspect—are aware of the dire situation that we humans are in at present:

- The fact that global warming is occurring now, and having deleterious effects (such as the fires problem currently in California).

- The probability that it is now too late to prevent a "tipping point" from being reached, and passed, after which change will become rapid—and societies will collapse, with a horrendous loss of human life.

- *If* governments become involved in addressing this problem, it's likely that it will engage in geo-engineering measures—which, as Al Gore has noted, would be "insane."

Given that the answers—insofar as there *are* any!—that result, and have resulted, from conventional thinking are non-answers, and worse (!), one could argue, I suppose, that Sigmund Freud was correct in asserting that humans had a "death instinct." It seems to me, however, that insofar as humans are "digging a grave" for themselves, this is because:

- They are engaging in *activities* that pose a threat to their future as a species—i.e., by burning fossil fuels they are increasing the "greenhouse effect," thereby causing (a) an increase, in trend terms, in the *global mean temperature*, (b) an increase in the *number* of storms, (c) an increase in the *severity* of storms, and (d) increased *variability*—and therefore unpredictability—in *weather* conditions. In addition, *El Niño* is, and will be, affected—by becoming more frequent, thereby affecting humans in an increasingly adverse manner.

- Their "possession" by certain ideologies, along with several other factors (such as excessive busyness, that prevents them from peering realistically into the future) in effect *disables* their ability to *think*

It is probably now too late to save more than a few humans from the ravages that global warming will be inflicting on us shortly (has *already* started to inflict, for that matter!), but there *is* a possibility that if some would begin engaging in *adaptive measures*, at least *they* would be "saved."

Unfortunately, the likelihood of this occurring seems to be close to zero!

Ironic, isn't it: The phenomenon of "falling in love"—which tends to be *fleeting*—is a sort of "possession" that has ensured the *continuation* of our species up to this point in time, but *other* types of "possession"—these tending to *persist*, once acquired—may (along with several other factors) ensure our *extinction* within a few decades!

Countering Foolish Optimism (expressed and otherwise)

Alton C. Thompson

Philip R. Davies concludes his recent "The Bible: Utopian, Dystopian, or Neither? Or: Northrop Frye Meets Monty Python" with these words (p. 107):

> Our modern experience is . . . surely that unsolved problems persist in most cases because they are insoluble; that politics is not the art of the can-do, but of the (very little) possible. We may wish or need to dream, but we will not dream away our own pride, greed, or tribal loyalty.

Earlier, however, Davies had (p. 94) declared that "the modern Western zeitgeist is *not* drawn to a tragic vision of life." He qualified this declaration, though, by stating: "But neither is it naively optimistic in the way that it seems to have been during the late nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, despite punctuation by two horrific major Western wars."

Whether *Davies* believes that the modern Westerner is best characterized as optimistic, pessimistic, or some combination thereof, what *I* perceive as important about the modern world is that our "leaders"—along with many others, true, but it is our "leaders" who most "count"!— are *implicit* optimists. And, more importantly, their implicit optimism is *foolish* in the extreme.

(I should perhaps note here that Davies's article was written as a commentary on Northrop Frye's *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (2002), but that fact has no relevance for the present essay.)

In asserting that our "leaders" tend to be *implicit* optimists, I am in effect suggesting that their minds are "possessed" by certain ideas to which the label "optimistic" might be applied. To be "optimistic" is to be *hopeful*, even *confident*, about what lies ahead—and those adjectives seem to be applicable to many of our "leaders" (and many others as well), except that the qualifier "implicit" should be added. And it's *that* fact which makes their (implicit) optimism scary.

Why? Because being *implicitly* optimistic about the future—as a result of being "possessed" by certain ideas—implies that our leaders are making *tacit* assumptions about the future, which assumptions may be utterly lacking in realism. Granted that the future, in being the "not yet," is something about which *realistic* statements are strictly impossible. Still, (a) if *trends* are discovered, (b) the factors *behind* those trends (which, thereby, *explain* them) become understood with reasonable clarity, and (c) an understanding of difficulties in *affecting* (and/or *countering*) those factors are also understood with reasonable clarity, it is possible to make reasonable projections as to what the future *will* be like.

Given this, the climate scientists who are projecting that we humans will be reaching, and then crossing, a "tipping point" soon so far as global warming is concerned, are standing on firm

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ground. One would not expect climate scientists to say much *specific* about the *implications* for us humans of a "tipping point" being reached and crossed, given that *no comparable past experience involving humans* is known, or even suspected. Thus, when Professor Kevin Anderson, director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change, stated, in December of 2010, that "only around 10 per cent of the planet's population–around half a billion people–will survive if global temperatures rise by 4C," he was making a *reasonable* prediction, but *not* one with solid empirical support.

Still, there *are* good, solid—if *indirect*—reasons for believing that disaster lies ahead for us humans. To quote from Dahr Jamail's recent article:

> "We as a species have never experienced 400 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere," Guy McPherson, professor emeritus of evolutionary biology, natural resources, and ecology at the University of Arizona and a climate change expert of 25 years, told me. "We've never been on a planet with no Arctic ice, and we will hit the average of 400 ppm... within the next couple of years. At that time, we'll also see the loss of Arctic ice in the summers… This planet has not experienced an ice-free Arctic for at least the last three million years."

> For the uninitiated, in the simplest terms, here's what an ice-free Arctic would mean when it comes to heating the planet: minus the reflective ice cover on Arctic waters, solar radiation would be absorbed, not reflected, by the Arctic Ocean. That would heat those waters, and hence the planet, further. This effect has the potential to change global weather patterns, vary the flow of winds, and even someday possibly alter the position of the jet stream. Polar jet streams are fast flowing rivers of wind positioned high in the Earth's atmosphere that push cold and warm air masses around, playing a critical role in determining the weather of our planet.

(By the way, the McPherson referred to above maintains the "Nature Bats Last" web site.)

Our "leaders," as implicit optimists, are either *unaware* of what climate scientists are saying and writing, or are *disregarding* it—are, e.g., learning about it, but letting what they learn "go in one ear, and out the other."

That's scary, because it means that it would be foolish to look to them for any sort of meaningful leadership in addressing the global warming problem—the likelihood that global warming, in its various "dimensions," will be inflicting a severe blow to our species within a matter of decades, if not years. There is, however, evidence that this has already started (severe storms, drought— and resulting fires—and erratic weather)!

That fact would be a clue to an *intelligent* species that its members should start determining *what* they could do to minimize the damage that could be anticipated—and then begin *acting* posthaste.

I have "countering" in my title, but what should be clear is that the *best* way to counter the foolish (implicit) optimism of our "leaders" would be to *ignore* them! That is, don't try to "convert" them to a more rational point of view—for that would simply be an utter waste of time. Rather, recognize that:

- It's now too late to prevent a "tipping point" from being reached and crossed.

- Our "leaders" are not likely to address the problem of global warming—and *if* they do, they are most likely to engage in activities (geo-engineering ones) that are likely to [exacerbate](#) the situation rather than the opposite.

- *Only* efforts at *adaptation*—by individuals and private organizations—would be meaningful in addressing this problem (with even *such* efforts not guaranteeing one's survival).

- Homesteading and (preferably) developing eco-communities are possible options, so far as adaptation are concerned.

- Start *acting*, before it's too late!

There is no reason to be optimistic about the human future—but there *is* some reason for hope, and it is important that at least *some* people recognize this, and then begin acting accordingly.

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From the "Fryeing" Pan

Alton C. Thompson

Philip R. Davies's recent (2012) —"The Bible: Utopian, Distopian, or Neither? Or: Northrop Frye Meets Monty Python"—indicates that he is interested in discussing the Bible from the pers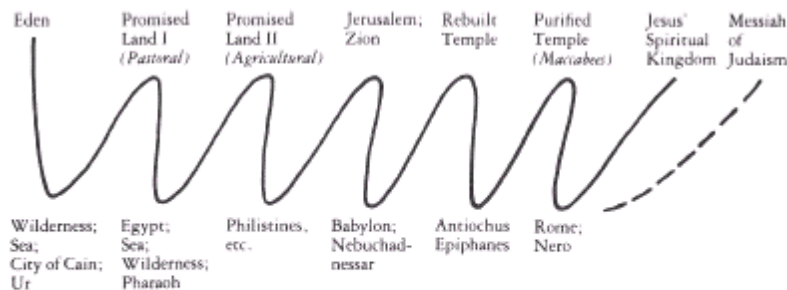pective of utopianism, or its "sister," "dystopianism," The article itself is a commentary on Northrop Frye's "Great Code." Davies's argument, in reacting to that Code, is summarized by the figure to the left. Although *Frye's* perspective on the

Figure 1. Northrop Frye's Great Code (note the Jewish variation [broken line] leading to the Messiah of *Judaism*).

Bible (as Davies notes) was basically optimistic, *Davies*, in comparison, perceives a "wave" pattern in the Bible that oscillates between optimism and pessimism. In fact, he states of his paper (p. 91): "The paper lays out a myth of disenchantment as a coding of the biblical narrative, concluding that the human predicament is insoluble, because neither God nor humanity have the power to change."

It is seemingly true that the history of the ancient Hebrews—*insofar as it is known*—had its "ups and downs." The question that *I* have, however, is: Why think of those changes over time in terms of the concepts of "utopia" and "dystopia"? (I have added the "insofar as it is known" above in recognition of the fact that Davies has a reputation as a "minimalist" scholar—like, e. g., Thomas L. Thompson—who has serious doubts about what can be known about early Hebrew history. But Yosef Garfinkel, in turn, has doubts about Davies—who, in turn, has *serious* doubts about Garfinkel!)

Strictly speaking, "utopia" and "dystopia" are *literary* constructs—Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* being an example of the first (being, in fact, the book that introduced the *term*), and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* an example of the second. Both terms refer to *hypothetical situations*—hypothetical *societies*, specifically—the former referring to a hypothetical society within which people *flourish*, the latter to a hypothetical society whose members live in *misery*. Whereas the basis for a utopian work is the author's belief that the existing societal situation is undesirable, but improvable, the basis for a dystopian work is the author's belief that the existing societal situation is undesirable and trending to become worse, with no possibility of reversing the trend: Optimism on the part of utopians, utter pessimism on the part of dystopians.

Given these definitions of "utopia" and "dystopia," it seems to me that there are *no* dystopias in the Bible, and just a few utopias. Examples of utopias are, first, this one presented in Micah 4:4:

> Everyone will sit under their own vine
>   and under their own fig tree,
> and no one will make them afraid,
>   for the LORD Almighty has spoken.

And Zechariah 3:10:

> "'In that day each of you will invite your neighbor to sit under your vine and fig tree,' declares the LORD Almighty."

Note that this "vine and fig tree" sort of utopia has a counterpart in this purportedly "historical" description given in I Kings 4:25:

> During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree.

Also, there is this from Leviticus 26:6:

> "'I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove wild beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country.

And, I suppose I should include this famous "milk and honey" passage from Exodus 3:8, although strictly speaking this passage does not refer to a utopia but, rather, to a (supposedly) actual situation, and not even a *societal* situation:

> So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

The above references to utopia all envision the hypothetical ideal society as a simple agricultural one, but a strange sort of society in that (a) the society itself is conceived, apparently, as a mere *collection* of independent families (extended or otherwise) engaged in agriculture, whose interactions one with another are left obscure, this society (b) lacking any sort of government, monarchal or otherwise, perhaps even lacking any religious institutions (!), etc.

Note that the first utopia identified by *Davies* (refer to the figure above) is Eden, but that *I* have made no mention of it. My reason for ignoring it is that Eden is presented, in Genesis, as an *actual* place, not a desirable *hypothetical* one. When that story came to enter the literature of the ancient Hebrews some may have *thought* of it in utopian terms (among other possibilities), but the fact that it was not *written* as a utopian situation causes me to exclude it from my discussion here.

The lack of any sort of societal structure in the examples of clear utopias in the Old Testament has a counterpart in the New Testament, although in that collection of books the term "kingdom of God (or Heaven)" occurs with some frequency in the gospels (and is implicit in the "Old Testament"), the word "kingdom" here seemingly referring to a hypothetical society that is being ruled, by a king, namely, God. Perhaps one could also think of the "vine and fig tree" utopia as *also* ruled by God, but this is left implicit rather than made explicit in the relevant Old Testament passages. In addition, the *characteristics* of that hypothetical God-ruled society are never made clear in the New Testament. With God ruling, presumably that society would be a good place to live—but no definitive judgment is possible on this matter given the absence of clarification of the *nature* of the "God" referred to!

Some might argue that the book of Revelation contains a utopia in Chapter 21:

> 21 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth,"[a] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. [2] I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. [4] 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death'[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

And:

> [9] One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." [10] And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. [11] It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. [12] It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. [13] There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. [14] The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.
>
> [15] The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. [16] The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia[c] in length, and as wide and high as it is long. [17] The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits[d] thick.[e] [18] The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. [19] The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, [20] the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.[f] [21] The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.
>
> [22] I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. [23] The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light,

and the Lamb is its lamp. [24] The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. [25] On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. [26] The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. [27] Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

I, however:

- See nothing appealing about cities *per se*, being a "country boy" at heart;

- Believe it simply *foolish* to think that death can be *banished* (along with the sun and moon);

- Wonder, *if* it could exist as specified, how long it would take for this city to become *over-populated*! (given that births would continue to occur, presumably);

- Wonder why anyone would think that it would be desirable to live *forever*, without a sun or moon in the sky at that; and

- Find totally unappealing such an *unnatural* environment—a city constructed of gold, whose wall was made of jasper (*why* is a wall necessary?!), the foundations of which are "decorated with every kind of precious stone"—there being no sun and moon in the sky.

Relative to this latter point: Given the role of the prophets in introducing ethical thinking into ancient Hebrew religion (their motivation being The Discrepancy, I would argue (see Chapters 2 – 4 in my *What Are Churches* For*?),* this passage in Revelation is highly *discordant* with reference to the prophets—i.e., *the individuals most responsible for Judaism as we know it today* (a thesis argued decades ago by Louis Wallis, and more recently—if but indirectly—by Norman K. Gottwald. Put another way, what the prophets were "about" (although they didn't know this!) was trying to return their society to a more natural way of life (which, for them, would have been one of nomadism {also this}, although their attempts were *pointing in the direction* of gathering-hunting, the way of life for which our bodies and brains became "designed"). Given this, the utopian vision of Revelation, in providing for humans a way of life *anything but natural*, is totally out of place in the Bible.

In conclusion, there is some utopianism in the Bible, but because it:

- Is so poorly developed therein, and

- Was developed in the context of a sort of society that has long been obsolete,

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that utopianism has little, if any, relevance for today. The reference in Revelation to there being no mourning/crying, tears [1], or pain in the Good Society (another name that I would give to a utopian society—except that I think of a Good Society as actually *achievable*) has some relevance for us today as *goals*, given that the societies that existed prior to the "Fall" into Agriculture (as Warren Johnson has put it, p. 43) came close to achieving these goals. Basically, however, the utopianism of the Bible—what little there is!—has little relevance for us moderns.

Even the ethical principles presented in the Bible—whether presented directly as laws, or indirectly in stories—have little relevance for us moderns, geared as they were for a very different kind of society. In fact, even the *notion* that "good" behavior will result from having proper rules/laws in place is *passé*, having been made obsolete by the utopian tradition—in which is recognized that human behavior *occurs in*, and is strongly *influenced by*, an *institutional* setting—so that attention must be given to *that* rather than rules/laws. (This is a fact recognized by Kat Kinkade and the other founders of the *Twin Oaks* intentional community—who initially tried to implement the ideas presented by B. F. Skinner in his *Walden Two*, but who abandoned those ideas because they proved unworkable, and who then introduced institutions that *did* "work."

True, there exist strong doubts today regarding the matter of whether the Good Society is anything more than a "mere" *concept*, given the threat to our continued existence as a species presented by global warming. The possibility that we are on the way to extinction should not, however, deter us from trying to *adapt* to the changes that global warming will be inflicting upon us in the near future (is *already* so doing, in fact!), doing so in a manner that will enable some semblance of the Good Society. Davies may believe that "human predicament is insoluble," but we must not allow such a viewpoint to cause us passively to accept the "inevitable." Certainly to be human is to at least *try* to "save" ourselves!

Endnote

1. One should keep in mind, however, that tears can express not only sadness, but joy.

Almost There

Alton C. Thompson

Chris Hedges, a columnist for the www.truthdig.org web site, gave a speech in Santa Monica, California, last fall, and used a transcript of that speech for one of his recent columns. He began his speech by making the interesting (to me, at least) declaration that Herman Melville's classic *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* encapsulated what the United States is, and has been, "about":

> The most prescient portrait of the American character and our ultimate fate as a species is found in Herman Melville's "Moby Dick." Melville makes our murderous obsessions, our hubris, violent impulses, moral weakness and inevitable self-destruction visible in his chronicle of a whaling voyage. He is our foremost oracle. He is to us what William Shakespeare was to Elizabethan England or Fyodor Dostoyevsky to czarist Russia.

Melville's "parable" about the United States has likely not been recognized as such by most readers, but Hedges is one of the most intelligent and best-read columnists on the scene, so that it is not at all surprising that Hedges would perceive this novel as a parable: His undergraduate major was in English Literature, and he then went on to Harvard University for a Master of Divinity degree. The latter fact—along with the fact that his father was a Presbyterian minister—has made him sensitive to moral issues. It is not surprising, then, that his educational background, in conjunction with his experience as a foreign correspondent (for nearly 20 years), has made him a vocal critic of U. S. foreign policy—to say nothing of internal matters, policy and otherwise. Along with William Blum (who writes a monthly "anti-empire" report), Hedges is one of my favorite commentators on the direction that our society is heading.

Hedges, in critiquing our society as it exists currently, began with some sharp comments on our economy:

> Our financial system—like our participatory democracy—is a mirage. The Federal Reserve purchases $85 billion in U.S. Treasury bonds—much of it worthless subprime mortgages—each month. It has been artificially propping up the government and Wall Street like this for five years. It has loaned trillions of dollars at virtually no interest to banks and firms that make money—because wages are kept low—by lending it to us at staggering interest rates that can climb to as high as 30 percent. ... Or our corporate oligarchs hoard the money or gamble with it

in an overinflated stock market. Estimates put the looting by banks and investment firms of the U.S. Treasury at between $15 trillion and $20 trillion. But none of us know. The figures are not public. And the reason this systematic looting will continue until collapse is that our economy [would] go into a tailspin without this giddy infusion of free cash.

He then proceeded to note that the "ecosystem is at the same time disintegrating." He observed, for example, that scientists from the International Programme on the State of the Ocean had, a few days earlier, stated that

> each of the earth's five known mass extinctions was preceded by at least one [part] of the "deadly trio"—acidification, warming and deoxygenation ("events" that are occurring *now*—ACT's addition) . They warned that "the next mass extinction" of sea life is already under way, the first in some 55 million years. Or look at the recent research from the University of Hawaii that says global warming is now inevitable, it cannot be stopped but at best slowed, and that over the next 50 years the earth will heat up to levels that will make whole parts of the planet uninhabitable. Tens of millions of people will be displaced and millions of species will be threatened with extinction. The report casts doubt that [cities on or near a coast] such as New York or London will endure.

He then added, pointedly,

> Yet we, like Ahab and his crew, rationalize our collective madness. All calls for prudence, for halting the march toward economic, political and environmental catastrophe, for sane limits on carbon emissions, are ignored or ridiculed. Even with the flashing red lights before us, the increased droughts, rapid melting of glaciers and Arctic ice, monster tornadoes, vast hurricanes, crop failures, floods, raging wildfires and soaring temperatures, we bow slavishly before hedonism and greed and the enticing illusion of limitless power, intelligence and prowess.

It pleases me immensely that a man of Hedges's stature is willing to be so blunt about the seriousness of the present and immediate future. Although Hedges's column does not specify the *nature* of the group to which he spoke in Santa Monica, I suspect that it consisted of highly-educated individuals, some of whom may be rather influential. If the latter is the case, it's conceivable that some of those in attendance will begin *acting* on what Hedges had to say—but this leads me to two criticisms of Hedges's speech.

First, although Hedges stated that "Tens of millions of people will be displaced and millions of species will be threatened with extinction" by global warming, he failed to make clear just *how serious* a problem it is. For example, extinctions are *already occurring* because of the global warming that has occurred so far. As Dahr Jamail noted recently:

> We are currently in the midst of what scientists consider the sixth mass extinction in planetary history, with between 150 and 200 species going extinct daily, a pace 1,000 times greater than the "natural" or "background" extinction rate. (Note the **daily** here!!)

Jamail added that *our own* species is faced by the threat of extinction:

> Some scientists fear that the situation is already so serious and so many self-reinforcing feedback loops are already in play that we are in the process of causing our own extinction. Worse yet, some are convinced that it could happen far more quickly than generally believed possible—even in the course of just the next few decades.

Hedges is *somewhat* correct in asserting that tens of millions of people are likely to be displaced as a result of global warming—in part because rising ocean levels will force those living in coastal areas (e.g., in New York City, as Hedges notes) to move to more inland locations. Of much more importance, however, is that global warming, in its various "dimensions" (with increased *variability in weather conditions* being of especial importance), will undoubtedly result in *critical food shortages* that will result in starvation, disease, and violence—resulting, in turn, in *societal collapse* here and elsewhere, and a *massive culling of the human population* (perhaps up to 90%, per some scientists).

Second, if one anticipates that those who heard Hedges's speech will then *act* on what they heard, the problem is that Hedges gave his audience little in the way of ideas regarding just *what they might do*. Hedges seemingly suggested that some sort of "revolution" was needed, and noted that "It is not the poor who make revolutions"—ostensibly suggesting, thereby, to his non-poor (I assume) audience that it was up to *them*, then, to start this "revolution." He went on to assert that that revolution must be of a non-violent nature—because (per a study by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan) "nonviolent movements succeed twice as often as violent uprisings."

That same study had concluded that "Nonviolent movements that succeed appeal to those within the power structure, especially the police and civil servants, who are cognizant of the corruption and decadence of the power elite and are willing to abandon them." Hedges added that "we only need 1 to 5 percent of the population actively working for the overthrow of a system, history has shown, to bring down even the most ruthless totalitarian structures."

Hedges's answer to the problem of global warming, then, appears to be:

- Start a revolution that has the aim of overthrowing the existing system

- Ensure that that revolution is non-violent.

- Get police and civil servants (neither of which was likely to have heard Hedges's speech!) to *lead* the revolution—because they are among the most likely element of the population ready and willing to abandon the Existing Order.

Earlier Hedges had stated that "We must develop a revolutionary theory that is not reliant on the industrial or agrarian muscle of workers;" I take it that he intended the above three points to constitute that "theory."

Later Hedges declared that "Our hope lies in the human imagination"—a statement with which I am in entire agreement. I, for one, however, fail to see much "imagination" in Hedges's solution to the threat posed to us humans by global warming. What I perceive, rather, is a "bookish" sort of answer that relies more on the results of academic research—*important* research, I agree, but "merely" research—rather than what I would call "common sense."

For me, the "common sense" answer to the problem of global warming is that:

- There *is* no satisfactory answer to this problem! A severe culling of the human population will occur, *regardless* of how we respond to the problem.

- Insofar as there *is* an answer to this problem, it lies with trying to adapt to the changes that will be inevitably occurring as a result of global warming. To a degree, those changes can be *anticipated*, but *surprises* must be expected—and *that* fact will make the task of adaptation difficult. It may not be possible to adapt to *all* of the "surprises" that Nature (made "unnatural" by human activity!) will have for us, but we must not allow that possibility to lure us into a state of inactive stupor.

As to *how* adaptation should proceed, I have commented on this matter on numerous previous essays on this web site (including, briefly, in my [most recent one](#)), and therefore feel no need to duplicate here what I have written elsewhere.

Have You No Sense of Decency, Sir?

Alton C. Thompson

Wisconsin has had admirable Senators such as Robert M. LaFollette, Sr. [1906 – 1925], and Jr. [1925 – 1947], William Proxmire [1957 – 1989], Gaylord A. Nelson [1963 – 1981], and Russell Feingold [1993 – 2011]—a few not-so admirable ones, such as Joseph R. McCarthy [1947 – 1957]. The latter Senator gained his notoriety during the Army-McCarthy hearings (involving accusations of being "Communist" by McCarthy), when Joseph N. Welch, head counsel for the U. S. Army, interrupted McCarthy's ongoing attack on Fred Fisher with the famous words:

Senator, may we not drop this? We know he belonged to the Lawyers Guild. Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator. You've done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?

I was a student in secondary school while these hearings were taking place; and although the hearings were televised, I have but a faint memory of having watched any part of the hearings.

McCarthy had won the Republican nomination for Senator by damaging the reputation of his opponent, Robert M. LaFollette, Jr., falsely accusing him of war profiteering. Given his dishonesty, it is not surprising that his "career" in the Senate was a shameful one that we Wisconsinites wish had never happened. Fortunately, noted journalist Edward R. Murrow, in a March 1954 television broadcast, exposed McCarthy for the charlatan that he was, a "Joe Must Go" recall effort was initiated in Wisconsin, Senator Ralph E. Flanders (a Republican from Vermont) compared McCarthy to Adolf Hitler (!), the Senate as a body "condemned" McCarthy in December 1954, and McCarthy died while in office (1957)—of alcoholism! In the special election that followed his death, William Proxmire was elected, and said of McCarthy that he had been "a disgrace to Wisconsin, to the Senate, and to America." So very true!!

This infamous part of our past came to my mind when I learned recently that our current Wall Street-puppet president, Barracks O'Bomber (or, if you prefer, "Satan follower"!), via the National Security Agency (NSA), spied on the participants in the 2009 Climate Summit in Copenhagen. This "good news" was just leaked to the press by "whistle-blower" Edward Snowden (who has been nominated again for the Peace Prize by two Norwegian lawmakers).

One would hope that Snowden is *not* presented with that prize, for it would put him into the same category as O'Bomber—who was awarded the prize in—ironically!—2009.

This (according to Kate Sheppard and Ryan Grim)

> document [just release by Snowden], with portions marked "top secret," indicates that the NSA was monitoring the communications of other countries ahead of the conference, and intended to continue doing so throughout the meeting. Posted on an internal NSA website on Dec. 7, 2009, the first day of the Copenhagen summit, it states that "analysts here at NSA, as well as our Second Party partners, will continue to provide policymakers with unique, timely, and valuable insights into key countries' preparations and goals for the conference, as well as the deliberations within countries on climate change policies and negotiation strategies."

The document in question reveals at least two important facts about O'Bomber:

- He—like the infamous Senator Joseph R. McCarthy—has no sense of what is, and is not, decent.

- He has no interest in addressing the problem of global warming in any meaningful way.

The second deficiency is, of course, far worse than the former one, and what it illustrates is that it would be foolish in the extreme to look to our president for significant leadership regarding the matter of global warming (among other issues!):

- He is *not* a man you can trust.

- As a Wall Street "stooge," his interest is in serving *their* interests—which happen to be of a short-run variety, and guided by ideology rather than reason and common sense—so that although he may give "lip service" to the problem of global warming from time to time, there is no possibility at all that he will use his executive power to engage in any meaningful actions relative to global warming.

- Even if O'Bomber *did* have a sincere interest in addressing this problem meaningfully, it is doubtful that his understanding of the problem is sufficient to do anything meaningful. I doubt, for example, that he understands, e.g., that:

  - It is now too late to halt further warming, with geo-engineering measures—which attempted, however, are likely to exacerbate the problem rather than alleviate it.

  - The fact that it is too late means that as global warming proceeds, the loss of human life will be horrendous.

- Insofar as there *is* a solution, it lies in attempting to *adapt* to the changes that will be occurring inevitably.

We *deserve* better than O'Bomber but, unfortunately, the "cards are stacked against us." Our society has reached a point of "development" such that a few rich individuals and corporations are in control of our destiny, seemingly, and their interests are not in line with the interests of our species. As Chris Hedges, e.g., has noted:

> The corporate assault on culture, journalism, education, the arts and critical thinking has left those who speak . . . truth marginalized and ignored, frantic Cassandras who are viewed as slightly unhinged and depressingly apocalyptic. We are consumed by a mania for hope, which our corporate masters lavishly provide, at the expense of truth.

(By the way, Cassandra "had the power of prophecy and the curse of never being believed.")

And as Pepe Escobar has put it (referring to O'Bomber's recent SOTU—i.e., State of the Union speech):

> No word, of course, about the "gentle", progressive dismantling of what's left of US democracy, via the Orwellian/Panopticon complex, through which 0.00001% elite rule is painfully achieved in a sanitized Total Information Awareness (TIA) environment. With the US government in total control of the Internet, that once-upon-a-time dream – the revolution will be televised – won't happen even on the web.

I wish that I could be like my five grandchildren, all of them young, and therefore blissfully unaware of the dangers that lie ahead. (In a couple of days my wife and I will be traveling to the Appleton area, about 110 miles to the north, to see one of our grandsons play in a basketball tournament.) Instead, I am saddled with the knowledge that the future will likely be bleak for them—and that's no way to live! Feeling *helpless* is one of the worst possible feelings!

Those Wacky Americans!

Alton C. Thompson

The following was published several years ago on the www.beliefnet.com web site, having been derived from *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend*, by Timothy P. Weber, published in 2004.

> In a recent Time/CNN poll, more than one-third of Americans said that since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, they have been thinking more about how current events might be leading to the end of the world.
>
> While only 36 percent of all Americans believe that the Bible is God's Word and should be taken literally, 59 percent say they believe that events predicted in the Book of Revelation will come to pass. Almost one out of four Americans believes that 9/11 was predicted in the Bible, and nearly one in five believes that he or she will live long enough to see the end of the world. Even more significant for this study, over one-third of those Americans who support Israel report that they do so because they believe the Bible teaches that the Jews must possess their own country in the Holy Land before Jesus can return.
>
> Millions of Americans believe that the Bible predicts the future and that we are living in the last days. Their beliefs are rooted in dispensationalism, a particular way of understanding the Bible's prophetic passages, especially those in Daniel and Ezekiel in the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation in the New Testament. They make up about one-third of America's 40 or 50 million evangelical Christians and believe that the nation of Israel will play a central role in the unfolding of end-times events. In the last part of the 20th century, dispensationalist evangelicals become Israel's best friends-an alliance that has made a serious geopolitical difference.

In my circle of acquaintances I know of *no one* having much interest in the Bible, to say nothing about (a) believing that the events (supposedly) predicted in Revelation will come to pass, that (b) the 9/11 "attacks" were predicted in the Bible, (c) Jesus will be returning to earth, and (d) during their lifetime, but that (e) this return will only occur when "the Jews" possess " their own country in the Holy Land."

I should qualify the above, however, by specifying that I know of no one whose interest in the Bible is of a "dispensationalist" nature—dispensationalism being a bizarre theological system developed in England by John Nelson Darby in the 1800s. Many of those who attended the Niagara Bible Conference (held in Ontario, Canada, from 1876 – 1897)—from which (Christian)

Fundamentalism emerged—were "Darbyites," so that it is not surprising that American Fundamentalism has, and has had, a strong Darbyite flavor.

Anyone with some familiarity with "dispensationalism"—nonsense which I will not dignify by discussing it here!—and also familiar with my writings, will know that *my own thinking* (I hate to admit!) parallels that of the dispensationalists (why didn't they choose a shorter word?!—I suppose that it adds a certain air of sophistication to their nonsense) to a degree:

- I believe that we may very well be living in an "end times" period, in that I believe that the continuation of our species is being threatened—but by global warming, with the very real possibility that global warming will render our species extinct within a matter of decades, if not years.

- I believe it at least *conceivable*, if not highly *probable*, that some people will survive this "holocaust."

However, principally my thinking diverges radically from that of that of "Dips" [1] (short for "dispensationalists, except that I have reversed the positions of "s" and "p"):

- I don't see the "end times," as *I* conceive it, predicted in the Bible.

- I believe that insofar as there *will* be an "end times," this will be because of *human activities*—including activities of Dips that involve the use, direct and indirect, of fossil fuels!

- I see nothing desirable about an "end times" caused by fossil fuel usage. For Dips the "end times" will be a good thing, because they will be flying off to Heaven, while those "left behind" will be destroyed; for me, the "end times" that *I* conceive will involve a severe "culling" of the human population by global warming, with the possibility that the entire species will be "wiped out." (Even now, every day many species are becoming extinct because of human activity.)

- For me, being "saved" has a this-worldly meaning. On the one hand, I know of no definitive proof that there *is* an afterlife: Perhaps there is, perhaps there isn't, but *if* there is, it is foolish to assert that knows anything *definitive* about it. On the other hand, those whose lives are "saved" in a this-worldly sense will be (a) those who have engaged in *adaptive* activities, or (b) those who have been "lucky"—although the world of the future, if it is at all livable for us humans, is unlikely to be a pleasant place to live! *Whether* or not one is religious, of the *degree* to which one is religious, will be largely irrelevant for one's survival.

- I don't foresee a return of Jesus—especially given the possibility (based on the lack of solid evidence) that *he never even came here in the first place!*

- I perceive the Bible itself as a collection of books written and edited by *humans* over a long period of time—that writing done for an audience that existed long ago. Whether that writing and editing was "inspired" is a matter that cannot be known for certain: Just because some "authority" *declares* that they were proves nothing

- The very selection of books for inclusion in the Bible involved bias, for no objective criteria exist for deciding what should, and should not, have been included. Therefore, the Bible as we have it today is but one possibility: If another group of individuals had been involved in the compilation, it's likely that a different set of books would have been selected. In addition, given that the various books that comprise the Bible involved translating from their original language(s), and that in some cases multi copies of a given book exist, with differences from one copy to another, there is littsle basis for asserting that one has an "authentic" version of the Bible.

- Given that the books constituting the Bible were written for an audience that existed long ago, the relevance of those books for those *living today* is limited.

- Not only is its relevance limited; each individual has a right to determine what that relevance is, but no right to impose *one's own* interpretation on others. One *does* have, of course, the right to *communicate* one's interpretation to others, but if one truly accepts the Biblical command to *love* the neighbor, one will not communicate one's interpretation in a manner that suggests that the hearer *must* accept one's interpretation—for example, threatening the hearer that s/he will spend eternity in a very warm place if s/he does not accept what one is saying.

  If anything, one will, rather, be eager to learn *that* person's interpretation, realizing—humbly—that one's own interpretation might be faulty, and that one can quite possibly learn something of importance from the other person.

  By using such an approach, one may (a) be able to develop a *bond* with those with whom one communicates, and may also (b) contribute to their spiritual well-being as well as their personhood, whereas by using an "attack" approach one will tend to build *walls* rather than *bridges*—with whatever followers you attract being weakened in their spirituality as well as their personhood.

  In addition, **your use of such an approach reveals you as a highly insecure individual!** You are unlikely to admit this (embarrassing) truth about yourself, but it *is* a truth.

Dips not only have a bizarre theology—which reflects the Jesus of the canonical gospels *extremely poorly* (which is not to say that those gospels present a [consistent "picture" of Jesus](#)). Their theology is *divisive*, in that it promotes an "us" vs. "them" mentality, thereby contradicting a fundamental teaching attributed to Jesus (quoting from [Hebrew Scripture](#)) that one love the neighbor—for it in effect permits one to *hate* the neighbor, on the (irrelevant!) basis that the neighbor's belief system differs from one's own.

One gets the impression that what attracts people to this peculiar theology is that from a *societal standpoint* they have a low income and/or have little education, and so are made to feel inferior, given the "success" mentality that plays such an important role in our society, "infecting" many, one might say—including with "[Bible-believing" people](#). By latching on to an unusual theological system that has a certain measure of complexity (and sophisticated vocabulary!), they are able to *submerge* their feeling of inferiority and actually feel *superior* to those who do not share their views: "*We* are going to Heaven, whereas *you* poor suckers are going straight to Hell when the [Rapture](#) occurs! After all, does not the Bible say, '[the last will be first, and the first last](#)'"? Put another way, becoming "possessed" by this theological system can be thought of as an example of [compensatory behavior](#).

What the above suggestion implies, of course, is that if our society were one within which a high degree of equality existed, it's unlikely that this theology would attract many, if any! A highly unequal society is *[good for no one](#)*—as Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett have [recently argued](#) at length. Those near the bottom suffer most, but everyone is affected adversely—some in some ways, others in other ways. Unfortunately, our society is becoming "progressively" [more unequal](#), and this trend is likely to continue until our society collapses as a consequence of the various "dimensions" of global warming—which [may be soon](#)!

But those near the bottom not only suffer (and, via the crimes that some of them commit, cause suffering in others). Because they tend to be ill-educated, they are subject to persuasion by others who may not have their best interests at heart—such as purveyors of strange religious ideas. And because of the residential segregation (on a socio-economic basis in particular) that exists in our society, those at the "lower end of the totem pole" tend mainly to associate with others in situations similar to themselves—so that by interacting primarily with others similar to oneself, there tends to develop a common mentality with such people.

As the late [Joe Bageant](#) understood, those occupying the bottom rungs of the society tend to be suspicious of "liberals," perhaps with good reason to an important degree (because such people too often don't have a good understanding of those near the bottom), but it's also true that their ignorance tends to make them act *against* their own interests—in, e.g., who they vote for. Because so many of them are some variety of Fundamentalist, and given the importance of Israel in their thinking therefore, they tend to vote for candidates who are strong supporters of Israel— thereby making [AIPAC](#) members happy, but making difficult the achievement of [justice for Palestinians](#).

Not only that, however. The fact that so many Americans accept the wacky notions that (a) the predictions of the book of Revelation apply today rather than the latter part of the first century, and (b) "will come to pass" means that no great groundswell of support can be expected for a movement directed at "saving" our species from extinction.

The irony here, of course, is that most with such ideas tend, on the one hand, to be "creationists" who believe that God created humans; on the other hand, however, such people are so "out of touch" with the real world—so "possessed" by their religious ideology—that they may be major "players" in the extinction of our species! How does *that* show any respect and love for God?!

Endnote

1. Usually "Dips" is thought of as short for "Dipsticks"—by no means a complimentary label to apply to others!

Our Pathetic "Leadership"

Alton C. Thompson

The United States was founded with a republican form of government, meaning that the government was designed to have three branches—legislative, executive, and judicial.. The reason for this division was to prevent the emergence of a "popular" government, that objective being further achieved by dividing the legislative branch into a House of Representatives and Senate, each empowered to block actions by the other. There is, of course, some wisdom in structuring a government so as to prevent hasty decisions—decisions that might later be regretted by at least some parties. And as James Madison—the "father of the Constitution—argued (in, e.g., *Federalist* No. 10), a republican form of government was preferable to a purely democratic one because a "pure Democratic form of government would invariably lead to the oppression of the minority and facilitate the transition from pure Democracy to Oligarchy."

Madison argued in *Federalist* No. 10

> that "the most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property. Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society".[15] He saw direct democracy as a danger to individual rights and advocated a representative democracy in order to protect what he viewed as individual liberty from majority rule, or from the effects of such inequality within society. He says, "A pure democracy can admit no cure for the mischiefs of faction. A common passion or interest will be felt by a majority, and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party. Hence it is, that democracies have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have, in general, been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths".[16]

Given that Madison believed that the causes of faction are "sown in the nature of man",[21] so the cure is to control their effects"—the basis for his support for the Constitution that he helped craft. Anti-federalists arose to rebut the arguments presented in the various *Federalist* papers, but their effect was not so much to affect the structure of the government that was created, as to result in the addition of a Bill of Rights to the Constitution. Over time rights were added to this Bill, giving the "ordinary" citizen more and more rights. However, a point has been reached in our society's development such that the formalities of our government, including the "rights" formally granted to us citizens, have become virtually irrelevant—because of the extreme degree of inequality that now exists in this country.

Consider, for example, this statement by Michael Lind:

The debate over inequality has gone global. [According to Oxfam](#), the 85 richest people in the world own as much as the poorest 3.5 billion.

Is inequality not only a national but also a global problem? In an age of globalization, will cross-border alliances among members of the same classes—transnational investors and transnational workers—produce a post-national global politics, a global class war?

The idea that cross-national class allegiances will trump cross-class national allegiances has appealed to many on the radical left ever since [Karl] Marx and [Friedrich] Engels called on the workers of the world to unite. It didn't happen in the 19th century, and it didn't happen in the 20th century. A global class war won't happen in the 21st or 22nd or 23rd centuries, either.

.   .   .   .   .   .

For sound center-left reasons . . .I offer this advice to those hoping that a global labor market, by creating global class consciousness, will lead to a global movement against the global rich by the united workers of the world: Don't hold your breath.

And [this one](#) by Lawrence Davidson:

The "Iranian problem" is really a U.S. problem. It points up very deep flaws in the U.S. political system, where money is legally considered "free speech" and policy formation often follows the wishes of the highest bidder. We have too many built-in incentives for war in this country: a military-industrial complex that employs millions, both Democratic and Republican politicians who find political success in supporting "defense" contractors, neoconservative ideologues who want the U.S. to militarily dominate the globe, self-interested bureaucrats whose budgets depend on an endless array of alleged threats, and special interest lobbies tied to foreign powers seeking to turn American aggressiveness toward targets of their own choosing. The outcome is often policies that kill and maim millions. It is only the present war-weariness of the American people that, for now, holds all of this destructive influence at bay.

What happens both internally and externally for us Americans is largely out of our hands—despite the fact that most of us have the right to vote. The "powers that be" are, therefore, able not only to *create* terrorists through the foreign policies that they create and implement but, having created them, justify military actions against them (incidentally killing many innocent people, of course—"collateral damage"!). Thus, a "vicious cycle" is created, in which more "terrorists" arise, "requiring" a stronger military presence, etc., etc. Is it any wonder that noted intellectual [Noam Chomsky](#) has [labeled](#) the United States a "leading terrorist state"?

Not only is the United States a pariah abroad—with that pariah status resulting in problems here at home (including our obscene expenditures on military adventurism). The Powers That Be in this country, led by Pres. "Barracks" O'Bomber, have been instituting policies that [hurt our own](#)

citizens economically—and also destroying our civil rights. As Chris Hedges has stated, speaking as if he were O'Bomber:

> The cosmetic reforms I'm proposing today will, I hope, give the American people greater confidence that their rights are being protected, even as our intelligence and law enforcement agencies, along with our courts, continue to eviscerate those rights. I recognize that there are additional issues that require further debate, such as your constitutional right to halt the wholesale capturing and storing of your personal information and correspondence and evidence of your geographical movements. But don't expect me to help. I sold out long ago.

And as Andrew Levine has noted, regarding the fact that O'Bomber made reference to inequality in his State of the Union speech:

> And so, . . . , Obama called for a raise in the federal minimum wage, and announced that, by executive order, he would require government contractors to pay at least $10.10 — up from $7.25 — an hour.
>
> If he stays true to form, there may be some legislative measures forthcoming in the next few months that he will do nothing to promote. But unless Occupy Wall Street or something like it returns, that should be all we hear about inequality from the White House from now on.

Despite the fact that we have numerous problems in the here-and-now, with the Powers That Be having the *direct* responsibility for most, if not all, of them, there is a problem of far greater importance. That problem is **global warming**—a problem for *all* of us because *it threatens our very existence as a species*. Not only are the Powers doing nothing of consequence to address that problem; through their promotion of, e.g., "fracking" they are causing not only problems in the here-and-now (with water quality, e.g.), but by promoting the *continued use* of natural gas, are contributing further to global warming!

Not only are *governmental* leaders doing more to *contribute* to the global warming problem than otherwise. *Corporate* leaders—such as those associated with The American Petroleum Institute—have been promoting natural gas as "America's New Energy Frontier," neglecting to add, however, the important point that natural gas is a *fossil fuel*, and that burning it adds "greenhouse gases" to the atmosphere. Evidently the American Petroleum doesn't want us humans to *have* a future! And, from an occupational standpoint, it seems reasonable that the major occupation in this country is *prostitution*—of the intellectual variety!

In listening to advertisements by fossil fuel companies would never guess that a crisis faces us humans. Even for the mass media global warming is a non-problem. As Tom Engelhardt observed recently, for them global warming is a non-story:

> Here's the scoop: When it comes to climate change, there is no "story," not in the normal news sense anyway.

The fact that 97% of scientists who have weighed in on the issue believe that climate change is a human-caused phenomenon is *not* a story. That only one of 9,137 peer-reviewed papers on climate change published between November 2012 and December 2013 rejected human causation is not a story either, nor is the fact that only 24 out of 13,950 such articles did so over 21 years. That the anything-but-extreme Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) offers an at least 95% guarantee of human causation for global warming is not a story, nor is the recent revelation that IPCC experts believe we only have 15 years left to rein in carbon emissions or we'll need new technologies not yet in existence which may never be effective

On the one hand, then, the mass media are "keeping us in the dark" about the threat posed by global warming, and so are our "leaders" in government and the corporate world—with those in both categories acting to *intensify* the problem, and some in the latter category assuring us that the continued use of fossil fuels is has positive benefits only! I'm glad that my 5 grandchildren have no inkling that the world they are living in is, were it an individual, in need of a qualified psychiatrist!

If a switchover to "safe" sources of energy were to occur within 10 years—which is at least *conceivable*—the ravages that global warming will be unleashing (has already begun to unleash!) would likely be diminished to an important degree. Not halted—because it's too late for that (given the greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere)—but *diminished*.

However, given the "leadership" with which we are faced—in the Western World, the United States in particular—the likelihood of this occurring is close to zero!

What that means, of course, is that if one is aware of the problem, it would be wise for one to try to engage in adaptive activities that might "save" one and one's children—and encourage others to do likewise. There is no guarantee that doing so would have the desired result, but *not* doing so *will* guarantee one's early demise!

Enemies of the People

Alton C. Thompson

Henryk Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People* has this plot:

> Doctor Thomas Stockmann is a popular citizen of a small coastal town in Norway. The town has invested a large amount of public and private money towards the development of baths, a project led by Stockmann and his brother, Peter, the Mayor. The town is expecting a surge in tourism and prosperity from the new baths, which are said to be of great medicinal value, and as such, a source of great local pride. Just as the baths are proving successful, Stockmann discovers that waste products from the town's tannery are contaminating the waters, causing serious illness amongst the tourists. He expects this important discovery to be his greatest achievement, and promptly sends a detailed report to the Mayor, which includes a proposed solution which would come at a considerable cost to the town.
>
> To his surprise, Stockmann finds it difficult to get through to the authorities. They seem unable to appreciate the seriousness of the issue and unwilling to publicly acknowledge and address the problem because it could mean financial ruin for the town. As the conflict develops, the Mayor warns his brother that he should "acquiesce in subordinating himself to the community." Stockmann refuses to accept this, and holds a town meeting at Captain Horster's house in order to persuade people that the baths must be closed.
>
> The townspeople—eagerly anticipating the prosperity that the baths will bring—refuse to accept Stockmann's claims, and his friends and allies, who had explicitly given support for his campaign, turn against him en masse. He is taunted and denounced as a lunatic, an "Enemy of the People." In a scathing rebuttal of both the Victorian notion of community and the principles of democracy, Stockmann proclaims that, in matters of right and wrong, the individual is superior to the multitude, which is easily led by self-advancing demagogues. Stockmann sums up Ibsen's denunciation of the masses with the memorable quote "...the strongest man in the world is the man who stands most alone." He also says: "A minority may be right; a majority is always wrong."

This fictional Dr. Stockmann was no enemy of the people, although his fellow townspeople came to *think* of him as such. In fact, Dr. Stockmann may remind one of Jesus—portrayed, as he is, in the (canonical) gospels, as one who had developed strong convictions as to what is "right," [1] and was unwilling to suppress those convictions, even if doing so meant that he would be "disappeared" [2] by the authorities.

Whether Ibsen was correct in asserting (via Dr. Stockmann, at least) that "a majority is always wrong" is a matter that I do not wish to discuss in this essay (my brief answer, though, being "it depends"). What I wish first to note here, instead, is that through history there have been numerous *actual* "enemies of the people"—recent examples such as Adolf Hitler [3] and George

("war criminal"—or, if you prefer, "mass murderer") W. Bush coming to mind. But even *that* fact is not my chief concern here—my focus, rather, being on a more subtle sort of "enemy of the people," that of *intellectual constructs*, certain ones in particular.

A given intellectual construct forces one to see reality through the "lens" provided by the construct. On the one hand, an intellectual construct allows one to perceive that which one might otherwise fail to perceive. On the other hand, however, by *focusing* one's attention on *certain* areas of reality, an intellectual construct *diverts* one's attention from *other* aspects of reality.

Now if those "other" areas lack in importance, the fact that one's mind is diverted away from them is of little or no consequence. If, however, the "blind spots" created by a given intellectual construct are of *great* importance, one's failure to perceive those spots may be of tremendous consequence—perhaps, in fact, to the point of being *fatal*.

It's entirely conceivable that many of our intellectual constructs cause "blind spots" in important areas of our thinking, but in this essay I give attention to just two—*Conservation* and *Economics*.

Conservation

The first point that needs to be made clear here is that the conservation movement has been, and is, diverse, with people such as Henry David Thoreau and John Muir [4] seeing Nature as almost sacred, and as needing protection from human activities (humans being perceived basically as interlopers!), and other people taking a more *practical* stance relative to Nature. It is those in the latter category to whom I will give attention in this essay, and a good starting point here is to comment on the very *word* "conservation."

The word itself implies that Nature is being perceived from a *human* perspective, and a rather *limited* one at that. This point is illustrated by the fact that the word "conservation" implies that Earth is to be perceived primarily, if not solely, as a *resource*, there being two types of resources—those that are *renewable*, and those that are *non*-renewable. Note that both of these terms refer to the *human usage* of that which is available in Nature, thereby reflecting (if but unconsciously) the view that Nature *exists* primarily for human use—or at least that our *primary* interest in Nature is *what* we can derive from it.

The terms "renewable" and "non-renewable" both implicitly assume that we *need* to derive things from Nature, with the terms implying that *how* we derive things from Nature *should* depend on the *nature* of the resource in question—i.e., whether it is, or is not, renewable. Note that I said "should" rather than "would," that fact indicating that conservation thinking— *regardless* of philosophical stance—is *normative* in nature. Conservationists *differ* in their values, but *all* have a certain set of values (which they may or may not *articulate* well, however).

The *act* of "conserving" would differ, depending on whether the resource in question was renewable or non-renewable. The former would be conserved by "harvesting" the resource—

wood, fish, etc.—at a rate lower than the rate of natural production. Harvesting at such a rate would ensure, it is argued, that that rate could be continued *indefinitely*. At least two assumptions are "built into" this argument—that the rate (a) *can* continue because the *demand* for the resource will remain constant, and also because (b) the *supply* will remain constant. What is not recognized thereby is that (a) the demand for the resource is likely to increase with an increasing population and/or a "rise" in standard of living, and that (b) the supply is likely to change—in either direction—in response to natural causes, as well as human-induced ones.

In the case of a non-renewable resource conserving would involve (a) trying to minimize demand for the resource, (b) trying to avoid waste, so far as possible, in using the resource, and (c) looking ahead to possible replacements for the resource as "richer" deposits of the resource become exhausted, necessitating extraction from less-rich deposits—thereby resulting in higher extraction costs, those costs passed along to consumers in the form of higher prices.

The concept of conservation described above (which, granted, reflects just *some* conservation thinking) not only has the deficiency of being strictly *utilitarian* in its view of Nature—at the expense of esthetic and spiritual considerations, and concern for lifeforms other than humans. More importantly, it fails to recognize that with certain non-renewable resources—the various fossil fuels in particular—their *use*, via burning, involves significant changes in Nature, which changes have implications for humans themselves.

Most notably, the burning of fossil fuels adds "greenhouse gases" to the atmosphere, which gases act to "trap" long-wave heat energy that is re-radiated from Earth. Given that earth is a system— meaning not only that its various parts interact, but that it has *negative* feedback mechanisms which act to maintain equilibrium—the addition of those greenhouse gases into the lower atmosphere results not only in heating the air, [5] but in *stressing* Earth System. From Earth System's (or Gaia's, as James Lovelock terms it) standpoint, that added greenhouse gas is a sort of "irritant" that it "tries" to fight. However, Gaia's ability to combat the extra heat energy is not infinite, and at some point Gaia will "give up"—with *positive* feedback mechanisms then coming into play, and bringing about rapid heating of the System (i.e., a "tipping point" will be reached, and then crossed).

That rapid heating will bring about drastic changes in Earth System, such that most, if not all, lifeforms will be affected—adversely, in virtually all cases. Numerous extinctions are already occurring, and such extinctions will accelerate, with humans quite possibly being among the victims.

Had our thinking not been controlled by a narrow concept of conservation, these extinction events might have been avoided. But given that the global mean temperature has increased by about 0.8° C. since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and the "climate commitment" value is believed to be between 1° C. and 1.5° C., it is virtually certain that the increase in the global mean temperature will reach 2° C. within a few decades, if not years. Given that most

climate scientists believe that such an increase will result in a tipping point being reached, the future does not bode well for us humans—with part of the reason for likely future disaster being our acceptance of a narrow—utilitarian—concept of conservation.

Economics

One could argue that it is because Economics thinking is so dominant in our society that our thinking about conservation tends to be biased in a utilitarian direction. Certainly a primary feature of Economics is that its orientation is to *material* things—to harvesting/extracting things, processing the materials harvested/extracted into a form that they can be used in manufacturing other things (if necessary—it isn't always, as fresh fish markets demonstrate), with manufactured items then transported to storage facilities, and then to retail/service establishments—where consumers can then make purchases. (Today, of course, many purchases are made online.)

Economics is a human-oriented discipline that assumes that humans have needs—*physical* ones in particular—most of which will be met with *physical* products. It assumes that humans are *self-oriented* beings, whose demand for material things is insatiable. Therefore, humans will strive to acquire as much in the way of material things as possible—and for their *personal* use, and the personal use of family members, it being assumed that *giving* material things to others would not only detract from *one's own* well-being, but would encourage negative personality traits (e.g., laziness) in recipients.

Human activity is perceived in terms of harvesting/extracting, producing, selling, buying, etc., doing so while staying within the law (perceived as somehow independent of people), the emphasis being on relationships among people (e.g., boss and worker, consumer and seller), with any relationships to Earth being of an *incidental* nature. That is, humans *occupy* Earth and *harvest/extract* things from Earth, but no thought is given to *whether* human activities have any impact on Earth, and *if* so, *how*—including how, *for them*!

Thus, insofar as Economics thought dominates our thinking—and it *does*, to an important degree!—it tends to *divert* our attention away from, e.g., the fact that we are "digging our own grave" by burning fossil fuels, given the implications of that burning (discussed above). Economist Polly Cleveland's "[Sustainability Squared]: How We Can Sustain Both the Environment and the People" is just one of the more recent illustrations of the narrowness of thinking by Economists—a sort of thinking which, in being the dominant form in our society, may doom us to extinction.

Conclusions

Humans presumably became a "brainy" species because having a larger brain had survival advantages. Not that [Darwinian "natural selection]" played any role in our evolution—for it played *no role whatsoever*! Rather, the key factors in causing the evolution of our large brain

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were predation (which favored the survival of groups of our human ancestors) and (female-choice) sexual selection.

During that period in our pre-history when we lived "close to the land" as gatherer-hunters, our growing brain size served us well—in surviving, and even thriving. Our problems, as humans, began when we (inadvertently) began to abandon our nomadic gatherer-hunter way of life for a more sedentary one based on agriculture. When we began this process of abandonment we could not have foreseen that what seemed to be movement in a positive direction would become something that was anything but.

The change in *way of life* seemed to impact how we *thought*. So long as our lives were lived "close to Nature," that way of life seemed to "protect" us from the sort of thinking that would lead to disaster. With the beginning of village, and then urban, living, however, we lost the close contact with Nature that we had had before, and that loss somehow resulted in changes in our thinking such that our *thoughts themselves* lost touch with our "mother," Nature.

The utilitarian thinking that characterizes *some* branches of Conservation thinking, and *most* branches of Economics thinking has done us humans a disservice in that it has enabled us to ignore a sort of behavior—the polluting use of fossil fuels—that may "do in" our species.

Ironic, is it not? We have used our brains to do amazing things—such as our explorations of space. But in the process we have created a situation today such that our *continued existence* as a species is in serious jeopardy!

Endnotes

1. Granted that each of the four canonical gospels presents a somewhat different "picture" of Jesus; were this not so, there would have been no point in including four versions of his life! For us moderns the contradictions between the four accounts is a problem, because rather than using the reasoning behind the story of the blind men and the elephant (i.e. the fact that just because different witnesses give different *accounts* of the same "event," this does not prove that they *witnessed* different events), we use that fact to argue either that (a) the nature of Jesus cannot be known or (b) Jesus never existed, the accounts of his existence being mere fictions. Some might argue that the reason for four gospels was to present a more complete "picture" of Jesus, but political factors are more likely the explanation. It may be true that Irenaeus, an early church leader, "In an attempt to unify the church . . . declared Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John the only Gospels that Christians should read. For Irenaeus the number four was extremely important: there were four directions, four winds, and he reasoned that there should be four separate gospels as well." To say that Irenaeus "reasoned" his way to this conclusion is, however, to give reasoning *per se* a bad name!

2. The modern term "disappeared" is, of course, rather inappropriate here, given that the Roman practice of crucifixion "was often performed to terrorize and dissuade its witnesses from

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perpetrating particularly heinous crimes. Victims were left on display after death as warnings to others who might attempt dissent. Crucifixion was usually intended to provide a death that was particularly slow, painful (hence the term *excruciating*, literally "out of crucifying"), gruesome, humiliating, and public, using whatever means were most expedient for that goal." That is, crucifixion was a very *public* way of "disappearing" people!

3. I am writing this essay during the 2014 Winter Olympics, which fact reminds me that my dad used to claim that Norwegian ice skater Sonja Henie was somewhere in the family tree. Given her association with Hitler and the Nazis (which, therefore, caused some Norwegians at the time to refer to her as a "quisling"), I hope that my dad was wrong. However, given the (presumed) fact that we *all* have the same family tree, *all* of us have both Henie and Hitler in our family trees!

4. Muir was born in Scotland, but while he was young his family moved to the United States, and began farming near Portage, Wisconsin—about 50 miles SSW of where I grew up.

5. Deforestation also contributes to global warming.

On Sustainability

Alton C. Thompson

For humans, "sustainability" has been defined as

> the potential for long-term maintenance of well being, which has ecological, economic, political and cultural dimensions. Sustainability requires the reconciliation of these environmental, social equity and economic demands—also referred to as the "three pillars" of sustainability or the 3 Es.

In discussing this concept, it is important, first, to recognize that "sustainability" can be thought of with reference to different "scales" of analysis, including the following:

- The sustainability of a certain *activity* (e.g., a certain type of agriculture) at a given location.

- The sustainability of a certain *way of life* (e.g., the modern urban-industrial way of life). In this case the location of the way of life may or may not be relevant: If the way of life involves activities that involve just a certain localized area, the *nature* of that area will have relevance for the sustainability of the way of life in question; if, however, the way of life involves activities that occur in many *different areas*, with trade occurring between areas having that way of life and other areas having *different* ways of life, determining the sustainability of the way of life in question becomes somewhat problematic.

- The sustainability of human life *per se*, given the situation that exists currently, and that seemingly *will* exist in the years ahead.

Second, it should be noted that if it is determined for some given point in time that human life *per se* is *not* sustainable, there is no point in undertaking analyses at "lower" scales. That is, if it is determined in 2014 that human life *itself* is not sustainable, it would be pointless to ask whether some given economic activity (e.g., a certain type of forestry) is sustainable. Thus, the *most important* "scale" for undertaking an analysis of sustainability is the *global* one.

In the case of certain *activities*, it is a fairly straightforward matter to decide whether or not the activity is sustainable. For example, the mining of copper ore is obviously a *non*-sustainable activity because (a) copper deposits were created long ago in geological time, (b) few, if any, copper deposits are being created now, so that as the mining of copper ore continues, (c) a point in time will be reached when all copper deposits are exhausted.

However:

- It's unlikely that *all* deposits will be exhausted, for (a) deposits vary in their "richness," with (b) the richest deposits being worked first (if their existence is *known*, that is!), and (c) as less rich deposits are increasingly exploited, a point will be reached where the cost of extraction will be excessive (i.e., the cost of extraction will exceed what firms are willing to pay for copper), so that (d) some deposits will be left in the ground (and substitutes for copper may begin to be used instead).

- Products that had used copper as a "raw" material, upon completing their useful life, may be recycled, so that newly-manufactured items may use *recycled* copper rather than copper derived from copper mines.

My point here is that although copper *mining* is a non-sustainable activity, it does not follow from that fact that a copper-*using* economic activity (as a "raw" material) is *thereby* non-sustainable.

In switching next to a global scale of analysis (skipping the "way of life" one)—because of its over-riding importance in comparison to the other two scales identified above—the key point to recognize is that Earth is a *system*. What that means, on the one hand, is that the various parts of Earth interact one with another from a causal standpoint—i.e., as changes occur in one part of the system (for whatever reason, or reasons), those changes will impact other parts of the system, some directly, others indirectly.

On the other hand, the fact that Earth is a system means that it is "equipped" with negative feedback mechanism that "work" to maintain stability, equilibrium. Thus, if a disturbance occurs—such as a volcanic eruption—those negative feedback mechanisms become activated, and "work" to (try to) restore the equilibrium situation that had existed before. This feature of Earth System is obviously an extremely important one, and one that we should appreciate—but few do, being ignorant of the fact that Earth possesses this feature.

What the above discussion implies is that so long as human activities do not disturb Earth System "unduly," those activities will be able to continue on indefinitely. Earth System is able to endure *some* "insults" by humans, but a key fact of importance here is that Earth System's ability to do so is *not* unlimited. In fact, it's possible that human activities could insult Earth System to a degree that Earth System will react *violently*, and in a direction *away* from the equilibrium that had existed: The positive feedback mechanisms with which Earth System is (also) "equipped" will be "called into action," the effect of that action being to *accelerate* the changes that humans had been inducing—resulting in an Earth System with very different characteristics (to the point of being unlivable for most forms of life).

The above possibility is not, unfortunately, merely a "theoretical" one, for the human use of fossil fuels since about 1750 CE has resulted in a buildup of "greenhouse gases" in the atmosphere—i.e., an increasing concentration of such gases in the lower atmosphere. That

increased concentration has caused more and more heat energy re-radiating from Earth to be "trapped," resulting in an increase in the global mean temperature. To date, the increase (since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution has been "only" about 0.8° C. But that seemingly small increase has been highly important for two reasons:

- Most climate scientists believe that if the increase would reach 2° C., a "tipping point" would be reached, and crossed—after which temperature would begin to increase at an accelerating rate. (Some climate scientists would argue that the tipping point might be closer to 1° C.!)

- The "climate commitment" value is believed to be between 1° C. and 1.5° C. That is, if we humans were to cease putting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere *tomorrow*, the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere would not suddenly disappear. Rather, they would *continue* to be in the atmosphere (but dissipating gradually over time) and, therefore, *continue* to have an effect on the global mean temperature.

Given the above facts/projections it seems inevitable that a tipping point will be reached, and crossed, within a matter of decades, if not years, and that the extinctions that are occurring at present will accelerate—with the strong possibility that *our own* species will become extinct. *If* that occurs, the *direct* cause will be an increase in the global mean temperature, but the *indirect* cause will be our stupidity—our "pouring" greenhouse gases into the atmosphere via our burning of fossil fuels (along with deforestation activities). Those who are *ignoring* global warming—arguing, instead, that we have a "bright" energy future—along with those who are *denying* the phenomenon, seem to be those who occupy highly influential positions in our society. For that reason, that humans will continue much longer as a species is in serious doubt.

Those of us with ways of life dependent on the use of fossil fuels not only have a way of life that is unsustainable; the *fact* that it is unsustainable poses a threat not only to us, but to *all other humans*—including those with "benign" ways of life (e.g., those gatherer-hunters that we have not yet killed!).

I am unaware of a requiem written for our species—except for the one in book form written by Clive Hamilton—and I am not suggesting that someone compose one. What are needed instead are efforts to *adapt* to the changes that will be occurring inevitably, efforts having the possibility of "saving" at least a small portion of our species. I thought about adding "if we're lucky," to the last sentence, but am not convinced that the survivors of the ravages of global warming will *feel* that they are lucky!

Sickness Care or Healthcare?

Alton C. Thompson

Several years ago my primary care physician announced to me that my right kidney had failed, and recommended that I make an appointment with a noted nephrologist who commuted to Milwaukee from New York City on a regular basis. I did, but upon my third appointment learned that he had given up commuting, and I was assigned to another nephrologist at that clinic. I didn't like the fact that I had not been informed in advance about this change, and so I found another nephrologist whose office was a short distance to the south. When my wife (who had accompanied me to this doctor's office) asked the doctor whether I would eventually need to go on dialysis, his answer was something like "Oh, sure"—which fact made me determined that that would be my last appointment with him!

I then started to think in terms of alternative medicine, and made an appointment with a practitioner of Chinese medicine who had an office about 5 miles from my home. Her specialty was acupuncture, so I was not surprised that after she suggested that I start taking a couple of herbals, she gave no indication that she would be ordering lab work for me to monitor my progress. This convinced me that I could expect nothing from her; and as she gave no indication that she wanted me to return for future office visits (!), I ceased my (brief) relationship with her.

As a friend of mine (with problems other than with the kidneys) is "into" "functional medicine," "naturopathic medicine," etc., he convinced me that I should go to a wellness clinic, and I found one in a nearby suburb. It happened that all of the practitioners at that clinic were naturopathic specialists of one sort or another (acupuncture, diet, chiropractic, etc.), and that fact appealed to me: By this time I had concluded that I had had my "fill" of allopathic doctors.

During my first visit at this center a number of blood samples were taken, and two weeks later, during my second visit, I was informed as where my readings were too high and too low. As a result of this blood work, I was advised to restrict my intake of foods high in potassium (such as bananas), and to start taking Renafood, Cranberry Complex, Vitamin D3, and Zinc capsules in "prescribed" dosages and times—which I started to do. (I say "prescribed" because the specialist I saw had a degree other than a M.D., one that does not allow her to write traditional prescriptions.)

I have a "flex" account for medical expenses which allows me to purchase prescribed medications with a special credit card, and to receive reimbursement for other medical expenses (such as office visits) by filling out a special form, attaching receipts, and then sending both to a certain address. I had purchased the Renafood and Cranberry Complex at the wellness center after my second visit there, so I made a copy of the receipt, along with a copy of the sheet listing

my "prescribed" medications, enclosed both with a completed form, and sent the package to the specified address.

A week or so later I received an email that notified me that my package had been received; thus, beginning about a week after that, I started waiting for a reimbursement check. I waited and waited, but no check came. I then went to the website for the "flex" account and found, to my surprise—and disgust—that my claim had been denied:

> 7* This product/service is not an eligible expense as defined by the terms of your program sponsor's plan.

The message on the web site added that I could appeal this ruling, and added:

> Your appeal must be received within 180 days of the date you receive this notice of your claim being denied.

> .   .   .   .   .   .

> You are welcome to submit additional information related to your claim along with your appeal, such as: written comments, documents, records, a letter from your health practitioner indicating medical necessity of the denied product or service, and any other information you feel will support your claim.

As I read this message, I thought to myself: "Why does the healthcare system in this country make efforts to *improve* one's health so difficult? Why, rather, is the orientation to *allowing*— even *encouraging*?!—people to *develop* medical problems, so that they then need to visit a doctor, or go to a hospital, for some type of treatment?"

It didn't take me long to provide an answer to my question: The fact that we have a capitalistic economic system. Actually, it would be more accurate to state that our system is *quasi*-capitalistic, given that pure capitalism exists only "on paper."

The "theoretical" ("hypothetical" would be a more apt term) basis of capitalism is the notion of an "invisible hand" promulgated in the late 1700s by Adam Smith. Smith "preached" that if each individual would be able freely to pursue his (or her) own interests, the common good would be better served than if some central planning agency were in charge of directing a society's economy. This "theory" had no empirical support (!), but was attractive to those greedy individuals who wanted to become capitalists, and so it got implemented to an important degree. (For a recent critique see this by Paul Craig Roberts.)

(Why is it that many baseless ideas—that turn out to have disastrous effects—have had their origin in Great Britain? Smith's ideas, in their implementation, led to the exploitation later featured in Karl Marx's writings, and Charles Darwin's baseless idea of "natural selection" (see

my *Ringing the Bell for Darwin*)—a fact recognized at the time by geographer Prince Peter Kropotkin—provided the "theoretical" basis for the evil of Social Darwinism.)

Medical care in a quasi-capitalist country such as the United States has an orientation to sickness care, rather than to the *prevention of health problems in the first place*. It seems to be based on the assumption that a certain percentage of individuals in a certain age group will "naturally" develop certain health problems, and therefore need medical care, with no possibility of *preventing* those problems from occurring. Why can't it recognize that prevention itself is an old concept, with *Prevention Magazine*, e.g., in existence since **1950**?!

In addition, our medical care system in this country is deficient in that:

- It results in very *uneven* care. Some receive an abundance of care, some little.

- It is very expensive—so that for those with low incomes doctor and hospital bills can be a serious burden, one that even leads to financial ruin.

- It results in a number of people employed in doctor's offices, clinics, and hospitals *far larger* than would be necessary if the orientation of the system were to prevention, rather. **One gets the impression that our system was designed primarily with *employment*, rather than *medical care*, in mind—to *maximize* the number of people working in doctor's offices, clinics, and hospitals, and thereby acting as a financial drain on the "suckers" in other professions and occupations!**

I am currently reading Kat Kinkade's *Is It Utopia Yet?*—about the community of Twin Oaks that she helped found (glad that I don't live there!)—and as I think about the concept of utopia, I am forced to conclude that if one is interested in designing the perfect society, one should study the United States. *Not* for the purpose of emulating what is done here, however. Rather, for the purpose of finding out what is done here, and then advocating for one's perfect society *the opposite*! For a lousy medical system is just one of the deficiencies of this rotten society!

(By the way, the wellness center that I referred to earlier irritated me in several ways—which I won't get into here—and I have therefore cut off my relationship with them, and am trying to find an alternative. Also, I have not yet decided whether I will challenge the ruling of the "flex" organization referred to above.)

The Problem With Activists

Alton C. Thompson

Ralph Nader recently presented—hypothetically, at least—awards to eleven activists, from Clarence Ditlow to John Richard. He says, for example, of two of them:

> 3. **Dr. Michael F. Jacobson** was a young PhD student in biochemistry at MIT when I interviewed him for a position with us. I told him we were looking for long-termers. He nodded. Nearly forty-five years later, Dr. Jacobson, having started the Center for Science in the Public Interest, has done more than anyone to document and brightly publicize enjoyable nutritional diets with less salt, sugar and fat. His Center knows how to communicate. Nutrition Action goes to 90,000 subscribers. He sends messages to your stomach in order to stimulate your mind.
>
> 4. **Al Fritsch**, another scientist PhD, joined us at the same time as did Michael Jacobson. He didn't spend much time in Washington before he returned to his home region of Appalachia where he started the Appalachia Center for Science in the Public Interest. Applied science and technology, as if people mattered most, was his credo. He pioneered simple, old and new ways – for example, to preserve the land and forest, make the drinking water safe, and grow more food – that he conveyed to local people of all ages who then became community scientists innovating themselves.

I have no doubt that all of the individuals on Nader's list are admirable people who have done wonderful things—just as I have no doubt that there are likely hundreds, if not thousands, of others who could also be so honored, in the United States alone.

Some of us are not activists because being one does not fit our personalities, some of us are (or so we claim) too busy with our everyday lives to be activists, etc. Another important reason for not being an activist, however, is a certain *philosophical* stance: The conviction that activism is basically *misguided* because it tacitly assumes that the Existing Order is basically sound, and just needs a little "tweaking."

Were the world situation different from what it currently is, such a (tacit) stance might not be objectionable—*if*, that is, one had sound reasons for believing that the Existing Order *was* basically sound, and not in need of basic change.

But that tacit assumption lacks relevance for our present situation, given the fact that global warming has been rearing its ugly head, and increasingly will become a problem. Not that those who report the daily weather have been *claiming* this, of course—probably because doing so would likely offend their corporate sponsors, and result in their being fired. Instead, these reporters attribute the erratic weather that has been occurring recently—including in Sochi—to changes in the path of the jet stream, for example. Technically, they have been correct in so

doing—but in eschewing any attention to the *further* question of *why* such changes have been occurring, they reveal themselves as a part of the "cloud" of intellectual prostitutes who people our society.

The erratic weather conditions of the recent past should alert us to the fact that something is afoot, so far as atmospheric conditions are concerned. Those erratic conditions should be interpreted as a *warning* that global warming is occurring—with the strong possibility that we will soon reach, and cross, a "tipping point," after which change will be of a catastrophic nature.

I don't use the word "catastrophic" lightly here, for what's likely is that weather conditions will, in a matter of decades—or even years—become so chaotic that our society will collapse, along with most other societies, the ultimate result being a horrendous culling of the human population (to say nothing of other species, many of which are becoming extinct *right now*).

Activists, by focusing on problems in the *here-and-now*, rather than the near future, are, unfortunately:

- Like most others in our society, helping bring that tipping point closer and closer to the present, while simultaneously

- Doing nothing to *prepare* us for societal collapse, and the terrible loss of life—via starvation, disease, and violence—likely to occur as a result of societal collapse.

Our brains became "designed," I suppose, via evolutionary processes to help us survive in the *present*—and for most of our existence that "design" has served us well. When, beginning about 1750 CE (i.e., the beginning of the Industrial Revolution), we began burning fossil fuels, however, we began a process of transferring carbon that had been safely buried under the earth's surface to the lower atmosphere. What we didn't realize then that in doing so we were contributing "greenhouse gases" to the atmosphere, and thereby—if but inadvertently— contributing to "global warming."

We have known about global warming for over a century (because of the research of several scientists, including Svante Arrhenius, in the 1890s), but for some reason we can't seem to take this problem seriously. A fairly large number of scientists are currently researching this phenomenon (actually, a *group* of phenomena), and what is reported about their research (e.g., in Dahr Jamail's recent, and excellent, article) is by no means "good news."

Perhaps activists of the past chose not to think of societal system change as a solution because the problems they perceived were, they believed, solvable via normal channels; for example, they believed that they could put pressure on their political representatives, and those representatives would then act on their suggestions.

Today, however, is a "new ball game." On the one hand, inequality is so extreme that the "filthy rich" are able to have an influence in politics far in excess of their numbers (the now-commonly-referred-to "1 %"). Thus, a *large* number of activists are no match for a *single* billionaire in influence.

On the other hand, the threat posed by global warming makes virtually all other problems that face us humans at present utterly trivial in comparison—for **global warming threatens our very existence as a species**. It's conceivable that some will survive the chaos that lies in our future, but the survivors are most likely to be those who have *anticipated* future catastrophe, and have therefore begun engaging in *adaptive* activities.

I have noted many times in previous essays on this site that homesteading and moving to an existing—or starting a new—cooperative eco-community would seem to be the best paths so far as adaptation is concerned. Would that more individuals who currently are engaging in activism would "wake up" to the threat posed by global warming, and would use their talents and energy to help "save" our species from extinction by engaging in such efforts!

We seem to be "built" to seek a "comfort zone," so that when we achieve such a zone, we tend to be "driven" to *remain* there. This means that those in a comfort zone will tend to ignore possible threats to that position, and to allow their minds to drive knowledge that *is* gained about possible threats into an "underground" in the unconscious mind. This aspect of our "natural" tendencies is an unfortunate one today, given that the threat that global warming poses is unlike any that humans have faced before, because it threatens our continued existence as a species.

People who are activists probably occupy a comfort zone, but are also intelligent and educated enough to know that *others* are not, and could use their assistance. This is an admirable trait, but is also a tendency that misses the point of the present situation—the threat posed by global warming. My hope, however, is that at least some activists come to "see the light," turn their attention to the vital matter of the possible extinction of our species, and start *acting* on the ideas for "salvation" that they generate.

"Keep it Simple, Baby!"

Alton C. Thompson

While I was in secondary school, and taking an English literature course, a story that we read in that class has stuck in my mind ever since. The story itself—"The Sniper," by Liam O'Flaherty—is vague in my mind. But the ending of that story has haunted me ever since:

> The sniper darted across the street. A machine gun tore up the ground around him with a hail of bullets, but he escaped. He threw himself face downward beside the corpse. The machine gun stopped.
>
> Then the sniper turned over the dead body and looked into his brother's face.

We were required to write an essay on this story, and I can still remember the passion with which I wrote my essay. When I read that last line, written in such a nonchalant manner, what "hit" me was that the sniper in question recognized not only that he had killed his *biological* brother, but had killed a *fellow human being*.

I recognized immediately that what made that last line so very powerful was—ironically—the total *absence* of emotion in it. I realized that it was brilliant on O'Flaherty's part to write such a sentence, for he knew (I guessed) that the reader—if s/he had but an ounce of humanity—would *supply* the necessary emotion. Would, that is, be shocked into the recognition that to kill another human being was, in effect, to kill a member of *one's own family*.

I don't know the extent to which others in my class shared my reaction to this story—as I don't recall discussing it with any of my classmates then, and as I have never attended a class reunion (as both of my best friends from those days died long ago), I have never had a chance to discuss the story with any of them since. I would like to think, however, that I was not alone in reacting to this story as I did.

I suppose that a variety of factors account for my reaction to this story, including the fact that I was raised by parents who took their religion so seriously that they left the denomination of their upbringing (a Norwegian Lutheran church that my ancestors had helped establish in Mt. Morris, Wisconsin) and, with several other couples, helped start a church of another denomination.

Another factor, however, is a personal experience I had as a teenager. We had a mongrel dog as a pet, which was getting old, and my dad said that it was time to get rid of the dog. Feeling a need to prove my masculinity, I volunteered to shoot the dog. Thus, I got a piece of wire, my 16-gauge shotgun, and a few shotgun shells, put them, and the dog, in our car, and drove to a wooded spot several miles from our home. I wired the dog to a tree, but the dog, sensing what

was about to transpire, broke free and started to run. I quickly raised my shotgun and shot it while it was running. The dog stopped, of course, and while it was writhing on the ground, I shot it a second time, and then went home.

This occurred on a Saturday. On the following Saturday, I happened to go to the back door of our home, and what appeared before my eyes was the dog that I had shot the previous Saturday. The absolute horror that I felt in seeing that poor thing—loyal to me in spite of the wounds that I inflicted on it—almost sent me into a state of shock. As I have been writing these words, tears have been streaming down my face, because of the deep shame that I feel still for the cruelty that I inflicted on this poor beast. [1]

I would like to think, though, that this experience has had a *positive* impact on me, for it helped me come to a conclusion that I might not have otherwise been able to reach—that killing others is *never* justified. Long having been an admirer of the late Paul Shepard, however, I would make one qualification: I agree with Shepard that (*The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*, 1973, p. 7) that "All major human characteristics—size, metabolism, sexual and reproductive behavior, intuition, intelligence—had come into existence and were oriented to the hunting life [given the term "cynegetic" by Shepard]." That is, we evolved as hunters (and gatherers—an activity engaged in primarily by females, with males doing the hunting), and our *very nature as humans* was shaped by that fact.[2]

The killing of fellow *humans*, however, is never justified, I believe—even in the case of the most monstrous criminals. Perhaps my Norwegian heritage is surfacing here, for in Norway criminals are treated as people, because the prevailing "philosophy" is that the objective of incarceration should be to prepare those incarcerated to *rejoin* society as useful, law-abiding citizens— punishment having an *opposite* effect. A sort of attitude that reminds one of Jesus's treatment of the woman caught in adultery.

Which brings me to the point that I have been "shooting for"—the fact (in *my* mind, at least) that Christianity "missed the boat" over the centuries by ignoring the principle, "keep it simple, baby!"—a variation on the KISS principle (i.e., "keep it simple, stupid!").

The question that I would ask of both Christianity and Judaism is: Why can't the basis of the religion be the (simple) question that Cain asked in this passage (from Genesis 4:8 – 9)?:

> [8] Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." [a] While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.
>
> [9] Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"
>
> "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

That is, why can't the basis of both Judaism and Christianity be that simple question, in the sense that their basis is the *answer* to this question: "Yes, I *am* my brother's keeper! And *acting* as if I am my brother's keeper is what my *religion* is all about"

A Matthew Eckel has made this claim regarding this passage:

> But what was Cain actually saying when he uttered those words to God? The Hebrew word used here for "keeper" means more than "protector" or "defender"; it is more akin to "overseer" or "master," as in "keeping" sheep (1 Samuel 17:20, 22); royal wardrobes (2 Kings 22:14); the king's forest (Nehemiah 2:3, 3:29); gates (1 Chronicles 9:19); vineyards (Song of Solomon 1:6); and the temple threshold (Jeremiah 52:24) [ii]. Although these jobs are foreign to most of us, we can get the sense of them by thinking "zookeeper" or "doorkeeper."
>
> Now, if you think that treating your brother like a dumb animal, a clothes collection, a tree, a gate, a vine, or a doorway is charitable, then consider the context—Cain was wise-assing God! Cain wasn't responsibly pondering, "Am I my brother's noble defender?" He was saying, "How the hell do I know where he is? It's not in my job description to keep track of him!" It was meant to shame God into replying, "On no, of course you aren't. I'm so sorry I asked." Simply put, Cain's rhetorical sneer is not the query of a loving, responsible brother, but the bald bluster of a brutal murderer.

An interesting interpretation that would never have occurred to me, I must admit!

Not being a scholar of the ancient Hebrew language, I can't comment on Eckel's claim here that the "keeper" in the Genesis passage *really* is the equivalent of "zookeeper"! What comes to *my* mind, rather, is this passage from Matthew 22:36 – 40:

> ⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"
>
> ³⁷ Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'[a] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b] ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

And this passage from I Corinthians 13, in which Paul of Tarsus tries to explain what "love" entails:

> 13 If I speak in the tongues[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,[b] but do not have love, I gain nothing.
>
> ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Which is another passage that I cannot read without tears welling up in my eyes, for it causes me to recall the further passage (Romans 3:23): "For all have sinned . . . ." That is, in being a human being, my *intentions* may be to always treat other well, but I often fall short of the mark.

The point that I wish to make here is that when I read the Genesis passage quoted above, I tend to read it *in conjunction with* other passages in the Bible—such as the two that I have just quoted—and I'm convinced that that's how others read it as well: We *interpret* being our "brother's keeper" to mean that we should treat our fellow humans in a loving manner, not as zookeepers! That is, we read this passage—and others—in the Bible not as if we were scholars interested in ascertaining the "real" meaning of passages, but read it as if it were a passage in, e.g., a newspaper article; that is, we read the passage as if its meaning were obvious to us— thereby tacitly assuming that the translator(s) did their translating in such a manner that that's how we would translate the passage.

We interpret passages this way because we were *taught* to read the Bible as if its message were *consistent* throughout; and even though we may learn later, via our reading of scholarly works, that—as I noted in my "On Humanism, Atheism and Religion"—the Bible is a diverse book (e.g., Jack Miles has pointed out that the "Old Testament" alone contains 24 different concepts of God!), the fact that we learned at an early age to perceive the Bible as *unitary* in its message causes that "lesson" to stick with us.

Ironically, however, it seems to "stick" more with lay people than with clergy! For in one's everyday life one *commonly* encounters people who make every effort to be decent in their interactions with others; members of the clergy, in contrast, seem to have a fixation on beliefs and rituals to the exclusion of how one should *interact* with others. One at times gets the impression that the message of the Bible is actually being better carried forward by members of the laity than by clergy!—the emphasis of the latter tending to be, rather, on those activities contributing to their continued *employment* as clergy. [3]

The "moral" that I draw from the above discussion is one that the Quakers seemingly drew many years ago: Clergy are not only not *necessary* for a worthwhile religion, but are, virtually of necessity, a positive *hindrance*. Therefore, "keep it simple, baby" by eschewing the use of a clergy. I used that "moral" in inventing "NeWFism"!

Endnotes

1. Today (February 24, 2014), while driving to work, I listened to the soundtrack from *Dances With Wolves*—some lovely music! After arriving, I looked up the movie on Google, and found this:

   > Because of the growing Pawnee and white threat, Chief Ten Bears (Floyd Red Crow Westerman) decides to move the tribe to its winter camp. Dunbar decides to accompany them but must first retrieve his journal from Fort Sedgwick as he realises that it would provide the army with the means of finding the tribe. However, when he arrives he finds the fort re-occupied by the U.S. Army. Because of his Sioux clothing, the soldiers open fire, killing Cisco and capturing Dunbar, arresting him as a traitor. Senior officers interrogate him, but Dunbar cannot prove his story, as a corporal has found and discarded his journal. Having refused to serve as an interpreter to the tribes, Dunbar is charged with desertion and transported back east as a prisoner. Soldiers of the escort shoot Two Socks when the wolf attempts to follow Dunbar, despite Dunbar's attempts to intervene.

   The shooting of Two Socks reminded me of my shooting our dog—except that my reaction was very different from that of the soldier who shot Two Socks!

2. On the basis of Shepard's thinking one could argue that because the activities of hunting (and gathering) played a huge role in how we evolved, (a) most of our problems today as humans have their basis in the fact that we have an "unnatural" way of life, so that (b) only *restoration* of a gatherer-hunter way of life will result in our manifold problems being solved. I agree with this to a point, but would argue that (a) our most important problem—that of global warming—*has* no solution, but that (b) insofar as it *does*, the answer lies in trying to adapt to the changes that will inevitably be occurring rather than restoration *per se*. Even then, (c) strict restoration is not even possible: All that we can hope for is some semblance of restoration.

3. My position here is not actually as strident as it might seem to be. After all, my older daughter and her husband (whom I both love!) are both United Methodist pastors, and I have considered several of the past clergy with whom I have been associated to be good friends.

"What Would Jesus Do?"

Alton C. Thompson

In 1896 Charles Sheldon—a minister in the Congregational denomination—published a novel entitled *In His Steps*, the book having the subtitle "What Would Jesus Do?" The book—one of the best-selling books of all time (having sold over 30,000,000 copies)—helped stimulate the "social gospel" movement, one of whose leaders—Walter Rauschenbusch—specifically cited Sheldon's novels as an inspiration for his own work.

My reason for referring to Sheldon's book here is that it came to mind in thinking recently about the shameful behavior of the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese—whose recent actions make one wonder whose "steps" they have been following: Ostensibly those of Jesus, but in actuality . . . . . Rather than finishing that sentence, I will let the reader decide for himself or herself.

In January of 2011 the Milwaukee Archdiocese filed for bankruptcy—being the eighth of eleven archdioceses to do so to date. The reason for filing for bankruptcy was "mounting clergy sex abuse claims" in the Milwaukee Archdiocese, with the filings in the other ten archdioceses being for the same reason. What's ironic about these filings, of course, is that these *legal* bankruptcies symbolize something deeper—*moral* bankruptcy—on the part of those who lead this archdiocese! [1]

Although the *direct* abusers in cases of sexual abuse are *individual priests*, the reason that lawsuits have been brought against the *institutions* for which they have worked is that the latter have often also been culpable. As one writer has explained:

> Members of the clergy occupy a place of exceptional trust within their religious communities. They present themselves to the community as the gold standard of behavior; their role is to lead by example and to teach life lessons. Consequently, their perpetration of child sexual assault is at the highest level of outrage and violation of trust.
>
> The culpability of religious institutions begins when they seek to play a shell game and hide the offenders, moving them from place to place to discourage disclosure, prosecution and justice. It is this very coverup that constitutes the institutional crime and creates roadblocks that make investigation and accountability almost impossible.

In fact, several years ago former (and now retired) Milwaukee Archbishop Rembert Weakland admitted that "he had returned abusive priests to church ministry without alerting parishioners."

The *moral* bankruptcy involved with these sexual abuse cases has a number of different "dimensions." First, a legal filing for bankruptcy is done for the (financial) protection of the

archdiocese. That is, the *interests* advanced by a bankruptcy declaration are not those of the *victims* of sexual abuse but, rather, those of the *archdiocese*. The archdiocese in effect declares, in filing for bankruptcy, that its primary commitment is to the church as an *institution*, rather than to its parishioners. Thereby, the victims are further victimized. This is not only sad, but ironic—for without the support of its *parishioners*, the *institution itself* could not exist!

Second, the archdiocese has acted to minimize its responsibility. A total of 575 men and women have filed sexual abuse claims in the Milwaukee Archdiocese alone (!), but the bankruptcy plan developed by the archdiocese will make payments to only 128 of them (per Annysa Johnson's "Abuse Survivors Feel Ill-Treated by Church Plan," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, February 16, 2014). The excuses offered for not making payments to the other 447 individuals:

- Some claims were beyond the statute of limitations for the fraud alleged by some claimants (i.e., that the archdiocese had defrauded them by exposing them to sex offenders that church officials knew, or could have known, were a danger to children).

- Some claims were for alleged abuses committed either by priests who were members of religious orders independent of the archdiocese or were otherwise not considered to be employees of the diocese.

- Other claims were made by individuals who claimed to be victims, but who had already signed settlement agreements, or whose claims did not involve fraud.

In other words, the approach of the archdiocese in deciding who should, and should not, receive compensation for past sexual abuse was a *legal* one rather than a *moral* one. This is a curious approach for an organization that claims to value the moral over the legal!

Third, the bankruptcy plan of the Milwaukee Archdiocese not only would make payments to just 128 of the 575 individuals who have filed sexual abuse claims, but those payments would average only about $27,000 per individual. One of the lawyers in the case—a Michael Finnegan—was, as a result, led to state: "The only people this archdiocese and Archbishop Listecki [the current archbishop] has chosen to treat horribly in this bankruptcy are abuse survivors. And those are the only people they promised to treat equitably and fairly." Both love and justice are values ostensibly valued by the Church, but it is difficult to believe that the bankruptcy plan developed by the Milwaukee Archdiocese exhibits either value.

Fourth, the plan sets up a $500,000 fund for lifetime therapy to all survivors having claims in the bankruptcy case. This might seem to be a generous offer, but some sexual abuse victims object to this part of the plan because they perceive it as causing them to seek help from the very organization that wronged them in the first place.

Fifth, and finally, as attorney Finnegan stated in his response to the plan, the victims of sexual abuse had been promised, by archdiocesan officials, that they would be treated "equitably and

fairly." Perhaps the officials involved believe that their plan does so, but it is doubtful that many—if any—of the victims of abuse believe that they have been so treated—and many of us who are outside observers have the same reaction to this plan. That is, it seems clear that the victims were *lied to* regarding how they would be treated—something that one should not expect of individuals who claim to be religious!

It is telling that when Archbishop Listecki announced, three years ago, that the archdiocese was filing for bankruptcy, he said (quoting now from Johnson's *TMJS* article) that:

> it was the only way to ensure the local church could continue its mission and operations, and treat childhood victims of sexual abuse—many of whom had begun to sue—'equitably.'

What seems clear from this bankruptcy plan, and its defense by archdiocesan officials, is that its orientation is to the "salvation" of the "skin" of those employed by the archdiocese rather than the welfare of those parishioners who have been psychologically damaged—if not physically hurt—by some of those employees (along with some priests of orders who have not been employees, but have been located in the archdiocese). Also, it seems evident that a part of the church's "mission"—*albeit an unstated one*—has been the sexual abuse of the children of some of its parishioners!

"Mother" Mary Jones, borrowing a line from "Mr. Dooley" (i.e., Finley Peter Dunne), is reputed to have once said "My business is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." And some church leaders (including the Archbishop of Canterbury) have stated this as the goal of religion. In the case the victims of sexual abuse by priests, however, those in positions of authority seem to be more concerned for their own *comfort* than the *affliction* they have instigated against some of their own.

Talk about "biting the hand that feeds it"! That doesn't seem very "Jesuan" to me! I don't think that is what Charles Sheldon had in mind when he wrote his famous novel!

Endnote

1. That fact should not be interpreted as meaning that the typical Catholic *parishioner* is morally bankrupt. My dad, as a carpenter, came in contact with a variety of people—most of whom were either Catholics or Lutherans—and he found virtually all of them to be fine people. (The members of one Catholic family in particular became close friends with my parents.) Our son is married to a wonderful Catholic woman, and they are superb parents to their two children. A previous priest at the church that our daughter-in-law was brought up in—and which my wife and I attended a couple of times—gave some of the best sermons I have ever heard. One of my best friends is a Catholic. Most of those I encounter who I know to be Catholics are fine people. Etc.

You're Partly Right, Lady

Alton C. Thompson

The mass media rarely mention global warming—as if its significance is so minor that there is no justification for giving it attention. The newspaper published in the metropolitan area where I live—*The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (which I usually refer to as the *Milwaukee Urinal*!)— recently, however, carried a letter by a man who argued that global warming is "natural," and another letter by a man who urged immediate action to prevent extreme storms, floods, etc.

A figure that I used in an [earlier essay](#) provides some support to the view that important changes in climate are "natural," for the figure shows dramatic such changes over geological time—it being impossible to attribute those changes to human activities (as, that is, "anthropogenic"). What the author of the first letter failed to realize, however, is that (a) there is no question that our atmosphere has been changing (in acquiring more and more "greenhouse gases"), (b) the global mean temperature has been increasing, and (c) the one increase is strongly correlated with the other increase.

Correlation does not prove causation, as the old "saw" goes. But virtually all climate scientists believe that causation *is* involved here, with human activities being the *fundamental* cause of an increasing greenhouse gas concentration, and thereby increasing average temperature. Furthermore, climate scientists are in substantial agreement that the human activity culprits are (a) the burning of fossil fuels and (b) deforestation.

The second letter writer—who was a "believer," so far as global warming is concerned—was correct in attributing recent extreme storms, severe floods, etc., to global warming, but didn't seem to realize that (a) it is now too late to prevent future disaster and (b) looking to government for relief is foolish, given that all that we can hope for is that at least a few humans will survive the ravages of global warming, (c) so that one will increase one's chance of survival by acting as an individual (perhaps in conjunction with other individuals/families) and engaging in pre-adaptive activities.

A more recent letter writer—this time a woman living in a suburb north of Milwaukee—argued that our "plight is due to the lack of contingent [contiguous?] natural areas to allow native plants and animals, who have co-evolved in a mutual dependence, to migrate. Insects and other herbivores have developed means to allow transfer of self-generated plant energy (through photosynthesis) to animals who [which] can't generate their own food, while plants need animals for pollination and other ecosystem services."

The lady who wrote this letter obviously has some knowledge of the discipline of Ecology, and is aware of interrelationships that exist in nature. But to say that our "plight" is attributable to human occupance patterns—which have developed in a manner such as to make plant and animal migration difficult—is completely to misunderstand (a) *what* our "plight" is and (b) *why* we are in this plight. That is, this lady recognizes that we are currently faced with some sort of environmental problem—without specifying that it is global warming; and she evinces no recognition that the *causes* of this problem are our burning of fossil fuels and deforestation.

She is right in recognizing the dependence of human life on other forms of life—e.g., bees that pollinate, earthworms that help create healthy soil, etc. And she is right in recognizing that human occupance patterns have wreaked havoc with other forms of life. What's missing from her analysis, however, is recognition that the *fundamental* threat to our species today is global warming—a problem that we have created for ourselves via our thoughtless actions.

The lady's letter continues her fixation on the necessity of providing migration corridors:

> We have many opportunities to enhance corridors to allow migration. All surface waters should have a native plant zone as they naturally did. We can use artificial corridors already crisscrossing our land: highway medians and verges [i.e., edges, borders], rail lines, utility corridors and our adjacent public and private properties.

I say to this lady, "More power to you. What you would like to see done is important, I agree. However, don't think that providing corridors to facilitate migration of plants and animals will prevent catastrophe from occurring. Global warming *is* 'on track' to result in catastrophe, and providing the corridors that you advocate will do absolutely nothing to prevent catastrophe from occurring. What you need to recognize is that global warming will, via its various manifestations, be wiping out most of the world's population within a few decades, if not years, so that given that, you should (a) *anticipate* it, and (b) then begin to *prepare* for it. If, in your preparatory activities, you *also* engage in activities to facilitate the migration of plants and animals, that would be great. Don't think, however, that such activities *in and of themselves* will be adequate to ensure *your* survival, or the survival of *other*s."

The lady concluded her letter by stating: "There are many things we can do individually or collectively to mitigate climate change, natural, artificial, or both." Here you are partly right, partly wrong, lady. First, there is *nothing* that we can do to prevent catastrophe resulting from global warming. Geo-engineering measures might be cited as an exception, but (a) such measures would require governmental involvement, (b) are unlikely to be implemented, and (c) if implemented might either be "too little, too late"—and might even exacerbate the situation. It is for *those* reasons that I assert that it is now too late to prevent catastrophe.

Second, I like the fact that you make no reference to government, seemingly suggesting, rather, that individuals act—as individuals/families, or as such units acting in conjunction with other such units—to address the problem of global warming. I am in full agreement with you on this

point. Where I question what you recommend, however, is your fixation on the need for facilitating plant and animal migration, and your belief that "mitigation" is *possible*—for I don't believe that there are good reasons for believing this.

Despite the fact that I disagree with much of what you say in your letter, I'm glad that you chose to write it, and that the local newspaper chose to print it—for such a letter can encourage readers to at least *think* about the issue of global warming. They won't learn much—if anything!—about global warming by reading the *Milwaukee Urinal*, but surely that newspaper has enough intelligent and educated readers to know where *elsewhere* to look for information on this vital subject.

The problem with the mass media is that their "thrust" seems to be to *divert* our attention from what's important (e.g., the Olympic events occurring now in Sochi) rather than helping us become more aware of what is happening *now* of importance, and what the *future* portends. This represents *irresponsible* behavior on their part, but I can't think of an answer to that problem.

An Ocean of Trouble!

Alton C. Thompson

As we burn fossil fuels, with a consequent transfer of carbon from below the earth's surface to the lower atmosphere (in the form of carbon dioxide, or CO_2), some of that carbon is absorbed by the oceans, resulting in an increased acidification of the oceans. And as Robert Hunziker has recently point out, that increased acidification "eventually has the potential to kill most, but not all, ocean life forms."

Among the points that Hunziker makes in his article are these:

> The rate of change of ocean pH (measure of acidity) [now occurring] is 10 times faster than 55 million years ago. That period of geologic history was directly linked to a mass extinction event as levels of CO_2 mysteriously went off the charts.

> "Today's human-induced acidification is a unique event in the geological history of our planet due to its rapid rate of change. An analysis of ocean acidification over the last 300 million years highlights the unprecedented rate of change of the current acidification. The most comparable event 55 million years ago was linked to mass extinctions… At that time, though the rate of change of ocean pH was rapid, it may have been 10 times slower than current change," IGBP, IOC, SCOR [2013], *Ocean Acidification Summary for Policymakers – Third Symposium on the Ocean in a High- CO_2 World*, International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme, Stockholm, Sweden, 2013.

The part of his article that I find most interesting is his discussion of the tiny island of Castello Aragonese, located 17 miles west of Naples, Italy. This is an island "that rises straight up out of the sea like a tower," and has "volcanic vents on the seafloor surrounding the island are emitting (bubbling) large quantities of CO_2."

Hunziker then adds this extremely important point:

> **this replicates the level of CO_2 scientists expect the ocean to absorb over the course of the next 50 years.**

Here's *why* that point is so important:

> **The only life forms found around Castello Aragonese are jellyfish, sea grass, and algae; whereas, an abundance of underwater sea life is found in the more distant surrounding waters. Thus, the Castello Aragonese Petri dish is essentially a dead sea except for weeds.**

The clear implication of this is: "As goes Castello Aragonese, so go *all* of the oceans of the world—given that global warming is a phenomenon that *is* affecting, and *will* affect, not just *some*, but *all*, areas of the world. It will, of course, affect different areas of the world to different *degrees* but, nevertheless *will* affect *all* areas. Castello Aragonese is, then, by no means "good news" for us humans!

If the oceans are "dying," with the exception of a few life forms, this means not only that the sea food industry will eventually be put out of business. Another implication is that global warming itself will be intensified. As I noted at the beginning, the ocean has been absorbing some of the carbon dioxide that we humans have created, but what must be kept in mind is that the ability of the oceans to absorb carbon dioxide is not unlimited. As its limit is approached, more and more of the carbon dioxide that had been absorbed by the oceans will remain in the atmosphere, and help intensify the "greenhouse effect."

Thus, the *basis* for the assertion that global warming is a process that tends to "feed upon itself" is not only that (a) as more and more bare ground is exposed (with the melting of ice and snow), the ground absorbs more heat energy from the sun, and also re-radiates more heat energy into the atmosphere; and (b) as permafrost thaws, it releases methane gas—which is much more potent as a greenhouse gas than is carbon dioxide—thereby contributing to global warming; but (c) as the oceans are less able to act as a "carbon sink," more and more carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere as a greenhouse gas.

Global warming is a set of phenomena that we should be worried about—not only because they will be making life, not only for our species but for many other species as well, increasingly difficult, but because of the high probability that a point in time will be reached when those phenomena suddenly begin to accelerate.

If we would soon begin to recognize the danger posed by global warming, and begin to take appropriate measures to respond, the "salvation" of some part of our species (along with other species) might be possible. My fear, however, is that we will wait until change begins to accelerate, at which time any efforts to address the problem will be futile.

Who was it that said our species is the most intelligent of all species?! Whoever it was, what's certain that that person lacked *knowledge*, and may have lacked *intelligence* as well!

Seeing Red . . . Again!

Alton C. Thompson

In an earlier essay I stated:

> Although I find it difficult to not admire those who strive to live a "green" existence, I need to note first that being "green" is an *individualistic* strategy—and thereby typifies a basic feature (problem, rather!) of American thinking.

> As an individualistic strategy it is, second, a *lifestyle* strategy, and for that reason alone is doomed.

I then added that the problem in being (merely) a *lifestyle* strategy is that is that it thereby "tacitly takes the existing structure of the society as a 'given'"—a point that I then elaborated upon.

These earlier comments of mine came to mind in reading Marc Bamuthi Joseph's recent "If We Don't Connect It to Race and Class, Then Green Politics Is Just High-End Consumerism." (Joseph is a poet, playright, and arts activist, and has been, e.g., an Artist in Residence at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has been associated with The Living Word Project, etc.) As a black, Joseph is sensitive to the fact

> that "green" lifestyles don't resonate with low-income communities; being "green" involves a set of behaviors that are financially or culturally inaccessible to millions of Americans. This presents a major problem for the environmental movement. If it is going to be successful, environmentalism simply cannot afford to be demographically segregated or isolated from the pathos of economic disparity.

Joseph adds:

> For communities of color plagued by high rates of homicide, hypertension, cancer, HIV and imprisonment, it is far more urgent to ask people to sustain life than it is to pitch them green politics. In my adopted hometown of Oakland, an African-American male is as likely to be the victim of homicide as he is to graduate from high school at proficiency levels for a California state university. This tragic situation is both systemically entrenched and historically rooted (the destruction of the black home and family was integral to chattel slavery, as was the denial of literacy), making the present prospects for anything but survival bleak in our harshest urban environments. If we're to talk about the environment in a city like mine, we must examine the impact of the death of another promising black boy on a local, social ecosystem.

I am not myself a black, but am in constant contact with blacks—in that in my small work group (of five individuals), two are black women; the place where I work is a black neighborhood; and

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when I ride from my home in a suburb on the south side of Milwaukee to work, I am surrounded by blacks for much of my ride. This constant contact with blacks has made me sensitive to the problems that blacks face in this society—at least to a greater degree than is likely the case for most whites.

My financial situation is not good enough for me to be of much help for blacks (or others) in need, but I would like to think that my "vision" for blacks is on a higher level than that of Joseph who, responding to the above-quoted statement concludes—rightly, I would add—that it "is naive and inappropriate to try to convert everyone to 'green living.'" Nor is "green politics" of relevance for blacks. Rather, Joseph suggests something different:

> Once we let go of "green" politics, a single, crucial question remains: what sustains life in a community? Artists across the United States are responding to this question by placing communities in need at the center of environmental conversations. Take the Bay Area artist Keba Konte, who builds low-maintenance aquaponic gardens that don't take up much space, don't disturb the earth and can feed a family of four. Konte's work is among several dedicated practices across African America that integrate creative intellect and environmental health at the local level. His arts-driven take on urban sustainability is part of a national trend that includes the work of DeWayne Barton in Asheville, NC, Rick Lowe in Houston, Theaster Gates in Chicago, Will Allen in Milwaukee and Majora Carter in New York's South Bronx. Whether reviving decaying buildings or initiating arts education programs, these artists are sustaining their economic, social and physical environments.

> (I have added the above links.)

My problem with the "programs" that Joseph publicizes and promotes is that they fail to recognize the seriousness of the threat posed by global warming. Those programs may have some (temporary) psychological and material value for the communities involved, but what they fail to recognize is that global warming is "on course" to cause *societal collapse* here and elsewhere, and to make human life so difficult that millions will be dying from starvation, disease, and violence—to the point that perhaps 90% of the world's population will be wiped out (as climate scientist Kevin Anderson has argued). In fact Dahr Jamail, in a recent essay has said this:

> Canadian Wildlife Service biologist Neil Dawe, . . . in August told a reporter that he wouldn't be surprised if the generation after him witnessed the extinction of humanity. All around the estuary near his office on Vancouver Island, he has been witnessing the unraveling of "the web of life," and "it's happening very quickly."

Joseph, unfortunately, gives no indication that he is aware of the possibility that our species is in danger of being basically, if not entirely, wiped out.

I, however, have been arguing for some time now on this web site that:

- Global warming has "progressed" to a point such that it's virtually inevitable that a "tipping point" will be reached, and then crossed, within a matter of decades, if not years—given that (a) most climate scientists believe that if the global mean temperature increases by 2° C., the tipping point will be reached (with some climate scientists believing it is closer to 1° C.); (b) the global mean has already increased 0.8° C.; (c) the "climate commitment" value is believed to be between 1° C. and 1.5° C.; and (d) there are no signs that we are willing to give up our "addiction" to fossil fuels (the main reason—along with deforestation—why our global warming problem exists).

- In principle, geo-engineering measures might "save" us, but (a) because they would need to be implemented by governments, and governments don't seem to be interested in doing so, they are not likely to be implemented; and (b) even if governments do decide to implement such measures, their decision to do so is likely to be too late to be effective—and may cause unforeseen problems that are even worse than global warming.

- It's virtually certain, then, that global warming will at some point (soon) accelerate, and in the process, via its various "dimensions," wipe out most of the world's population—with the possibility, even, that it will render our species extinct (it is already causing numerous extinctions, as the Jamail essay cited earlier points out).

- Insofar as we have any hope for survival it lies with individuals and private organizations recognizing the severity of the threat posed by global warming, and then acting on that recognition—by engaging in pre-adaptive activities. Specifically, I have advocated that people begin to homestead and (especially) become eco-communitarians—by either moving to an existing such community that will have them, or creating one for oneself and like-minded others.

Here in Milwaukee we have Will Allen as an important resource (mentioned by Joseph in his essay), and I have tried to interest him in my ideas—because I have come to see blacks as a potential "vanguard" of a New Society movement. In addition, I have tried to interest a black journalist who writes for the local Milwaukee paper in my ideas—but in both cases have met with no success, for I haven't even been able to get either to respond to my communications.

Life in an eco-community would be "frill-less," and for that reason the average black would have an easier time adjusting to eco-community life than would the average white. However, I have not yet discovered the "key" for convincing local black leaders regarding the important role that they could be playing in creating the New Society—and, perhaps, "saving" our species from extinction. My hope, though, is that this will change!